what price youth

by

ELIZABETH COOPER

WHAT PRICE YOUTH

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Author of:
"Drusilla With a Million," etc.

The story—amusing, poignant, intensely human — of a woman who could not say goodbye to youth and who managed to have that rare thing —A SECOND CHANCE.

Still charming, with a delightful home, a devoted husband and two attractive daughters, Eleanor Wakefield was desperately afraid of one thing—old age. Then one day "she met Mildred Lee, a movie star, who said 'I've been taken apart and put together again, and now I uplift the drama by drawing $500 a week as the her-o-ine instead of $200 as the her-o-ine's mother. Don't give up, dearie, be the chicken that keeps father home, instead of letting the other chicken get him.'"

How Eleanor took her advice and how her second chance gave her something she had not bargained for —romance, adventure and a strangely perplexing problem — make a story sparkling with interest. Yet through it runs an under-current of the secret wistfulness that has come, perhaps, to every woman—sharply intensified by life in the modern world.

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Alberta Wagner

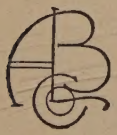
June 1931

What Price Youth

A Novel

By ELIZABETH COOPER

From the Plot by LILLIAN M. STONE



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CHAPTER I

HELEN TERRY threw down her cards with an angry little gesture and a frown was between the kindly eyes. She was plainly irritated.

"Eleanor, *why* did you play that Queen? If you hadn't played that Queen——"

"Oh, bother, Helen. I lost count—I wasn't paying attention just then, and——"

"Well, if you can't pay attention, don't play bridge. You're so abstracted lately——"

Tom Wakefield, kindly, anxious that his adored Eleanor should not be blamed, said:

"Never mind, Helen. Eleanor never can play well when she hears music; we all know that."

Eleanor stopped playing the tattoo upon the table, sat back in her chair and laughed a little nervously.

"Yes, I am a rotten bridge player—especially when I hear good dance music. How we can sit here like a lot of octogenarians and play this stupid game of cards when there is dancing——"

"But it passes the time, Eleanor, while we are waiting for the young people."

"Passes the time. That is what is the trouble. Who wants to just pass the time! I want to *live* the time."

"Well—what can we do? We feel we must come with our girls, and they want to dance——"

"Yes, I want to dance, too. I dance just as well as Beth or Peggy—and I love it."

Helen settled back in her chair and gave a comfortable little chuckle—the contented laugh of the acknowledged middle-aged woman, who is not worrying about her age, who has accepted her fate and does not let the advancing years worry her.

"I used to like to dance, too, and I still dance—if any one has the courage to ask me. But I don't expect it of the boys—who wants to dance with a woman of forty-eight who weighs one hundred and sixty when he can dance with a girl of nineteen who weighs one hundred and twelve? I don't blame them. Even John," pointing to her good-looking husband who passed with a very pretty girl, "picks them tender when he wants to dance. I don't blame him at all."

"Yes, but I dance better than Betty there——"

"Eleanor, don't be like St. Paul and kick against the pricks. You are, what shall I say—well, we are both not in our infancy, and you *do* weigh more than one hundred and twelve, now you must admit that—and our hair *is* getting a little grey—and we are comfortable, Eleanor, comfortable. That is the best that we can claim now. We must sit back and be 'mothers.' I can see the time of knitting for me——"

Eleanor threw the cards she was holding on the table. Her hands were very pretty, long and slender

and of a creamy whiteness—the hands of an artistic, nervous, temperamental woman.

"Helen, you make me tired! I will *not* get old! I will *not* join the 'mother' class! I will never sit in the corner and knit. I'd rather *die* than give up!"

"Well, so be it. I'm going to be happy, old or young. I don't like trouble. Let the young do the dancing—dancing is for youth anyway. If I wanted to compete with my daughter, think of all the trouble I'd have to go through. I'd have to diet, and is there any slavery worse than watching the waist-line. Mary over there steps on the scales every morning and if she is half a pound more than she was the day before yesterday—she cuts out a salad leaf. Pshaw, I can't be bothered."

"But you say yourself that John prefers them young and slender——"

"Yes, to dance with. But for a steady diet he likes 'em comfortable. I'm not worrying about John. He'll always come home, whatever their age and weight."

Eleanor started to rise when a very pretty girl and her escort, a boy of about twenty, came up. The girl's face was flushed and lovely. She danced up to the four sitting around the table, perched herself on the arm of her father's chair, whose face lighted up as he saw his pretty, happy daughter.

"Hello, Dad. Hello, Ninny. Why the black looks? Did they beat you at bridge? Well, never mind, you can get back at them tomorrow night. The world's not lost."

She swung a slender, silk-clad leg, ruffled her father's hair and gave a little sigh of happiness. "Isn't this a spiffy party? I think we are doing things very well here at the club."

"It's stupid, intolerably stupid, and I will not come again," Eleanor said angrily.

"Oh, Ninny—I know what's the matter with you. You want to dance. Milton, dance with Ninny. She loves to dance."

The boy politely bent to the mother: "Will you dance this with me, Mrs. Wakefield?"

Eleanor did not reply at once; her face showed that it hurt to have her daughter practically force her escort to dance with her; but the desire to dance was too strong. She would put aside her injured feelings for the joy of a dance, so she rose.

The four watched her as she walked away. As Eleanor disappeared in the dancing-room, Helen said:

"Eleanor does keep her age well. I wish I could diet and not get so fat—just plain fat. But I like the sweet things——"

"Mother ain't no sylph, if you mean that. She ought to cut out the goodies, too, and I keep telling her——"

"Oh, leave her alone, Peggy. Your mother suits me just as she is."

"Yes, Dad. She suits me too, but she don't suit herself. I've never seen any one who is so possessed with the idea that she wants to be young as mother is. She's a joy to all the fake beauty specialists.

Didn't she pay ten dollars for that white-of-egg treatment, when she could have bought the eggs for a dollar and done it herself? And, Dad, do you remember when she was going through that mud treatment?" Peggy laughed and, turning to Helen, said: "It was a scream, Aunt Helen. She tried it one day when Jennie was out and she just got her face all plastered up with the mud when the back doorbell rang and she had to go down and let the iceman in. When he looked upon Ninny's black face, he thought he had 'em, and he dropped the block of ice on his foot and wanted to sue Dad. Gee, it was a scream."

They all laughed, but Tom frowned a little.

"That's all right, Peggy. If your mother wants to try all those things, well, it's harmless enough. She can do anything she wants to do, as far as I am concerned."

Helen looked at Tom rather quizzically. "You're right, Tom. Let her do those fool things if she wants to. Eleanor's been a pretty good wife as wives go."

Tom was quiet for a time, then he said: "Yes, we've been married twenty-four years. I always kind o' wondered why she married me. A little drug clerk. And she had such chances——"

"Well, you've done pretty well, Tom. You've got the best drug business west of Chicago."

"Yes, I've done pretty well, but still I've always wondered. Eleanor was so pretty—and she still is to me."

"The village belle, I presume," pertly put in Peggy.

Tom frowned at his daughter. "Not only the village belle, young woman, but she was pretty anywhere. When we used to go to Chicago and even New York, they all stared at her. Why, I remember one time we went into one of the big show restaurants in New York and everybody turned around to look at her. There wasn't a woman in the room that could hold a candle to her."

"I bet she just ate it up," said Peggy.

"Well, of course she liked it; you would, too. And neither of you girls are as good-looking as your mother was, and you haven't had the attention either."

"No, Father. You're going to have two old maids on your hands; although Beth is showing symptoms that are dangerous. She and Fred want to sit out in the shady places, and sort of hold hands. But you'll survive, although I wouldn't want to look forward to passing my life with two women like Ninny and me." She turned to her father. "I'm just like Ninny, ain't I, Dad? Sort of temperamental, heh? I bet you've not had a bed of roses with my august mother, have you?"

Tom laughed a little uncomfortably.

"Well, Eleanor is sort of moody at times, but I always remember that it is rather hard on her in this little town. She ought to have had a bigger city, a sort of—sort of—broader horizon."

Helen broke in. "Broader horizon, nothing, Tom. Why, here Eleanor is the whole thing. In a big city she would be a small toad in a big puddle. Here she's

the great social dictator, if we have such a thing as society. Anyway, whatever we have, she made it."

"Yes," said Peggy. "Mother has to do something to work off her superfluous energy, so she starts this country club, and she's really made a good thing out of it; we have to hand it to her—when she does a thing, she does it."

They were quiet for a time, then Peggy said:

"I wonder if I'll ever get married, Aunt Helen. I look at you old married people, and I wonder if I want it. Now, look at Dad and Ninny. Dad's highest idea of a happy life is to come home in the evening, eat a big dinner, read the paper, perhaps a story in the *Saturday Evening Post,* play a game of casino with mother, and then hit the hay. It's too exciting; I couldn't stand it. Casino, gee, he's dippy on casino."

Tom laughed a little embarrassed. "Well, what of it? I do like casino. But Eleanor don't play it often. We only have a game when she's nothing else to do."

"And, believe me, my dear progenitor, she finds something to do, if she sees that casino look in your eye. Mother can hunt up more engagements or she'll even go to prayer-meeting, rather than play 'the old maid's game' as she calls it. She hates it, Dad. Why do you make her play with you? Can't you see that she's a martyr?"

"Why—why—she don't mind. She's very nice about it."

"Yes, if she's cornered. Ninny is the model wife,

and she knows it is her duty to play casino at least once a week with you, the same as she knows it is her duty to see that your socks are darned and that the cook makes you your favorite apple pie once in so often. Mother's long on duty."

"Tom, what's that new thing that Eleanor's backing now? Something about Freud and self-expression. Is the woman lecturer going to stop with you?" Helen evidently was trying to change the subject.

Peggy laughed. "I'll tell you all about it, Aunt Helen. That's Mother's latest, this lecturer on self-expression. You know your dreams have a lot to do with it. If you dream of a blue bull dashing over a field of green poppies, it's a sign that you've lost your taste for your husband and ought to elope with the iceman. Great stuff, you find out a lot about yourself. You must give your inner self expression. Don't let anything stop the development of your soul. If your children and your husband are a hindrance to self-expression, can 'em . . . . Yes, she's coming to us, and I bet she has flat feet and squirrel teeth, and she wants a man and can't get one, so goes around making all the women who have one, discontented with theirs."

"Peggy, where do you get your ideas? I'm glad you aren't my daughter. You'd make me nervous," said Helen.

"Where do I get my ideas? I don't know. I just get 'em. You know I'm not asleep when I go around, and I just see things and hear things, that if you've

got any gray matter make you think. We of the younger generation, as you like to speak of us, ain't just dubs. We may have something on our heads and in 'em besides our bobs, although you don't seem to think so. Anyway, I'm not spending my time with beauty specialists, and uplift lecturers, and massage—and——"

Helen laughed. "Well, I won't blush, as I don't do any of those things. Psychology—is that the word? —sounds to me like some kind of disease, and I can't afford beauty specialists, and I don't massage——"

"Thou speakest the truth, Aunt Helen. It wouldn't hurt you to do a little of the last and latter, if you wish me to speak frankly, but you're nice as you are," and she reached over and patted the plump hand, "and you don't get little worry wrinkles because you're forty-five, and I bet you don't care whether you have a soul or not. I call you comfortable—at least to live with."

The dancers began coming into the card-room, and Tom rose.

Eleanor came back to the table, her face flushed and a happy light in her eyes.

"Gee, your mother can dance, Peg," Milton said as he handed her to her seat. "You got to be goin' some to keep up with mother."

Peggy made a pretty little grimace and said: "Yes, we got to hand it to mothers these days. We daughters must take a back seat."

Tom rose. "Come on, let's go home."

Helen tried to stifle the yawn that was too strong for her and finally she yawned openly and loudly. "Yes, let's go home. Speaking of daughters, where is mine?"

Peggy laughed. "Oh, she's gone home with Mollie and Jim Carson and Jack. They're going to stop at the Palmetto and get some real food."

Helen rose hastily and showed that she was angry. "Why didn't she tell me she was leaving? I could 'a' been at home in bed, where I wanted to be three hours ago. What's the use of a chaperone these days! We're parked some place and then forgot. Why didn't Mary ask me if she could go?"

Peggy laughed at her. "Ask mother? It isn't done nowadays, good lady. That's Early Victorian. You'd waste your breath by saying No. Mary knows you're short of breath and wants you to conserve it."

"Well, she knows I don't believe in these road houses."

"Neither do I—tonight. Come on, let's go home. And say, Milton, get the gang and let's have a real party up at the house. We've got some cheese and I'll make a rabbit and Dad's got some near beer——"

Tom looked up at his daughter and then at his wife. It was plainly to be seen that he did not want a noisy party at the house. The main thing in his mind was sleep. He had been a martyr for half the night; he wanted to have peace and quiet the other half.

Milton clapped his hands.

"That's a grand idea, little one. It's only the shank

of the evening. Who'll we take? Betty and Jane and Doc and Bill Phelps and where's Beth?"

"Oh, she and Fred'll be somewhere on the back porch. They're at the point when they prefer the shady boskys and where two's company and three's a crowd. But I'll round 'em up."

Tom put up his hand. "No, you don't, Milton. I want to sleep."

"Oh, go on, Dad! You'll sleep a long time when you're dead. Go and get the crowd, Milton. We'll get our wraps and be ready."

Tom again started to say something, but Eleanor put her hand on his arm. "Let them come, Tom. I like to hear them; I like to hear the laughter and the fun——"

Tom frowned, but one could see that he felt he was beaten.

"Oh, well, if you want 'em. But I'd like to get one good night's sleep a week. I should think they had danced enough."

Peggy laughed. "Danced enough, Dad? I have never danced enough. My idea of Heaven is an orchestra that goes by celestial electricity and never stops. But we're not going to dance; we're going to eat."

"Yes, but you'll make a hell of a row doin' it and I can't sleep."

"Dad, I'm ashamed of you! Such language will corrupt Milton."

Helen Terry gave another yawn. "I thought we

were going home. I presume Mary took the car. You'll have to drop me at my house."

"You can come with us, Aunt Helen."

"Nothing doing, little one. I agree with Tom; I want my beauty sleep. I'm going home and to sleep."

"Model mother," said Peggy. "She don't lie awake and shed tears about wayward daughter orgying in road houses."

"Oh, Mary's all right. She's got good sense. I don't worry about her if the boys don't carry a flask. I don't believe in 'em drinking, and Mary knows it. Mary don't drink."

Peggy made a little aside to her mother: "No, she only laps it up . . . . Father, take Mother and Aunt Helen; we'll be there as soon as you are. Come on, let's slide."

CHAPTER II

It was eleven-thirty the next morning and Eleanor was dressing to go out to a Woman's lunch. She had used at least four lotions on her face and was now carefully powdering it preparatory to putting on the rouge, a special preparation she had prepared for her in a well-advertised beauty parlor in New York. The door opened and Beth came in. She had evidently been to golf.

"Hello, Ninny. Where you goin'?"

"Jane McKennon has her bridge lunch today."

"Well, you'll have a good time, if you like that kind of a time. But for the life of me I can't see how you want to sit around all this lovely afternoon and play cards."

"What else is there to do? And Jane does things very well."

"Sure she does them well. She'll have out her real lace luncheon set and all the fancy new things she got in New York, and you'll have grand prizes and work for them as if you couldn't afford to buy them if you wanted to. The house is filled with junk now that you've won at bridge parties."

"I have some very sensible things too; they are not all junk, as you call it."

"Yes, you won a box of writing papers, twenty dif-

ferent kinds, that you'll never use, as you have your own with your monogram. But you were as tickled at winning that big box of paper as if you had to use the grocery paper to write your letters on."

"It's the game, Beth."

"Yes, the idea that you've beaten some one else. Well, I won't play bridge except as a last resort or on a rainy day."

Eleanor carefully applied the rouge, then looked at her daughter in the glass. She noticed her as if for the first time.

"Where'd you get that dress? It's new, isn't it?"

"Yes; isn't it nifty? The latest thing in sport toggery. I bought it at McCleary's with my last allowance—and then some."

"Where were you last night? You didn't come home with us."

"No; Fred and I went for a drive. It was lovely moonlight. I didn't want to join the noise. Peg and her crowd get on my nerves."

"Aren't you seeing a lot of Fred? It seems to me you are always together."

Beth was silent and flushed a little under her mother's scrutiny.

"Well—Fred's all right, isn't he? I thought you and Dad liked him."

"Oh, he's all right, but——"

"Well, don't bother, then."

A halloo was heard from downstairs.

Helen Terry's voice came to them: "Are you ready, Eleanor? I'll drive you over."

Eleanor frowned. "There's Helen already. She is always early. Hand me my dress." Then she called: "Come on up! . . . Go get her, Beth—and tell Peggy to come here a moment. I want to talk to her before I go out."

Beth left the room, and Helen Terry soon came in. She seated herself in the most comfortable chair, and watched Eleanor as she put the finishing touches to her face.

"I must say, Eleanor, you do it well. Is that the new stuff you sent for? It looks natural."

"Yes, but I really hate to use it. Why can't we keep our skin? Now, my complexion was——"

Beth came in followed by a yawning Peggy in dressing-gown.

"What's that I hear about complexion? Has Mother got a new one? She sure is an easy mark for all the beauty specialists."

Helen laughed. "You girls certainly are respectful to your mothers nowadays."

Peggy yawned again. "Mothers don't want respect these days. The other day I started to take her arm on the stairs and she nearly threw a fit, asked if I thought she was too old to walk downstairs alone."

"We don't need to be helped downstairs, but that is no sign that you shouldn't respect your mother," and Helen laughed.

"Filial piety to the present mother, Aunt Helen"

Why, they're younger then we are, with their bobbed heads and their cigarettes. Talk about flappers, it's the mothers who are flappers."

Beth joined in a little indignantly. She was always trying to stop the argumnts of plain-spoken, cynical Peggy, especially when aimed at her mother, whom she adored.

"Peg, you certainly are the limit; just because Mother is trying to keep young, you are always knocking her. For my part, I give Mother credit for keeping up the way she does. How would you like Mother to get dowdy and old—like Mary Freeman's mother. You know you'd be ashamed of her."

Peggy turned on Beth. "Oh, my little saint of a sister. That's right, take Mother's part when she is here; you know you feel the same way I do about this youthful business. Take a little rouge off your left cheek, Ninny. You look as if you were on fire on one side."

"I won't do any such thing. Is it too red, Beth? If Peggy had her way, I would be wearing a cap and shawl, knitting and making my life just one long, sweet sacrifice for my children."

Helen was quiet for a time, then she said: "I wonder if there isn't a little sex jealously between daughters and their good-looking mothers?"

Beth and Peggy both spoke at once.

"What an idea, Aunt Helen! As if we could be jealous of Mother——"

"Well, nothing definite. But I was reading——"

"Say, Aunt Helen, the stuff you women read now! Freud or Zung——which is it at present? Well, are you off? Cut down on the calories, Ninny."

Eleanor turned. "Do you mean to say I am getting *fat*? I scarcely eat anything."

"No, you are not fat; plump, we'll say. You are getting just a bit broad across the narrows, and you know, Ninny dear, flapper dresses don't look nice on hips. Just pass the icecream, for once."

An angry light came into Eleanor's eyes, and she started to leave the room.

"Did you want me, Ninny? If you only wanted a scrap, why call me from my morning dreams?"

"Oh, I forgot. We are getting up a party for the movies tonight. Rafaelo Cortez is playing."

"That wop? Call me out. He's too beautiful. I swoon when I look at him."

Eleanor looked at her daughter in amazement.

"How can you talk like that! I think he is perfect! He is called the perfect lover. I thought all you girls were crazy about him."

"Not me; I never could see him with a pair of binoculars. Dad and I agree on our movies. Give me Bill Hart or Dug or Charlie Chaplin. I want to laugh or see a man ride a horse or risk his fool neck in some way. I don't want to see him g-o-o all over the place. If I want a ten-minute kiss, I'll get it first hand. It's the old dames that fall for Rafaelo. They have to get their lovin' vicariously. All I get out of him is a snooze. I certainly can sleep with that baby. The

moment his face appears on the screen, that moment my eyelids close in fond repose."

Eleanor opened the door, and as she was leaving, said: "Peggy, I do not understand you at all. You are no daughter of mine. Wherever you get your ideas, I can't see! Come on, Helen."

Helen rose leisurely from her chair. She was the kind that don't vacate a comfortable seat until it is absolutely necessary.

When the women left the room, Beth turned to her sister.

"Peg, why are you always nagging Mother? You never meet but you have a fight. Let her keep young if she wants to."

"Yes, but she don't. All this stuff of worrying and fighting against age is silly. Why can't she get old gracefully. You know it's written in the Bible: 'The thing I have feared has come upon me.' She is working this idea into her subconscious mind by thinking of it all the time. Why can't they all embrace the lavender and old lace instead of making this losing fight."

"Well, they are all doing it. I suppose we'll do the same when our time comes. We can't understand it now; we're young."

"Not me, old lady. When my time comes to step down, I'll do it gracefully. I'll go up on my little shelf and stay there and say I like it. This thinking about it all the time and worrying about every little line don't

get you anywhere. It only makes more come. But I'm off. I got to dress."

As she was leaving the room, she stopped in front of the mantel. "Look who's here! If Mother hasn't got Rafaelo's picture!" She studied it a moment, then said with an accent of disgust: "Well, that gets me. If I was Dad I'd put that in the fire."

Beth came to her and they both looked at the pictured face. "He is good-looking, we'll have to hand him that."

"Yes, and I presume when Mother looks upon his youthful form, she compares him to Dad with his little beeny. Dad ain't no Apollo compared to Rafaelo, but I wouldn't stand for it if I was him. Having him on the mantel in her bedroom. My *foot*!"

"Dad don't care. He's only a movie actor."

"No, Dad won't say anything, no matter what he thinks. I think he is far too easy with all of Mother's fool ideas. When I get married I want my man to have nerve enough to hit me over the head with a brick if I get crazy about a movie actor. Take me early and train me, before I've got the chance to learn I can bully him and it gets a habit."

"Peg, what's the matter with you? Mother don't bully Father. He adores her, and wants her to do whatever she wishes to do."

"Yes, that's the trouble. He adores her, and lets her be just as selfish as she wants to be. He gives in all the time, and its grows on one, this being selfish. He's always thinking what a good wife she was when

they were poor, and she's the mother of his children, and such rot. I bet she didn't want either of us. We were just accidents, so why wear a halo about it? And why make poor old Dad eat out of her hand all the time, because she used to get his three a day and happened to have two children, through carelessness."

"Why, any one to hear you talk would think Father was a martyr. He isn't at all."

"Sure he is. The good, old, faithful kind with a hair shirt. But Mother's the shirt. Doesn't she drag him out to dances, when he hates dancing and stumbles around like a baby camel? Doesn't she take him to all the sentimental shows and movies, when he'd rather be at home and asleep?"

Beth laughed. "Well, he *does* sleep."

Peggy joined in her laughter. "Sure he does, and Mother doesn't know it unless he snores. Dad's decided that of all the stars, he can sleep better with Norma Talmadge, but has managed to get quite some lengthy naps with Gloria Swanson. But Mother just sits there entranced, watching some wop on the screen make love. Why, I bet that Rafaelo goes home at night and eats garlic and wears an old pair of carpet-slippers, and perhaps beats his wife because the macaroni isn't done right."

"He isn't married."

"No? Not now? Well, perhaps it's intermission time for him. I suppose he gets more mash notes as a loving bachelor than if he was married. Any-

way, I'd beat her up if I were Dad." And Peggy left the room.

Eleanor came home just in time for the six o'clock dinner. She was excited and a real flush showed beneath the rouge.

Tom ate slowly, enjoying the good dinner; then, after the roast, he looked up at his wife opposite him, and said in his kindly voice:

"Had a good time, Nell?"

Eleanor sighed. "It was a lovely party. Twenty-four, and Jane's table was wonderful. Pink roses, and candles, and with her lace luncheon set and that lovely Bohemian glass—it was perfect."

"Candles? On a day like this? I bet she had the shades all down and you couldn't see the sun, and you filled up on a lot of near food, then went in and played bridge and gossiped and ate candy and had tea and cake—who won first prize, Ninny?" said Peggy.

"That new woman, Mrs. Fisher, I think her name is. She plays a wonderful game of bridge." She turned to her husband. "I'm sorry to be so late, but Helen and I went to Mrs. Burns' reception, the one she is giving for the English writer—I've forgotten his name. He wasn't very good-looking, and he had nothing to say. I don't believe he's a writer at all."

Peggy laughed. "I presume you wanted him to reel off a few chapters of his latest book. I'll bet he's fed up on women and receptions. But he has to do it, so his books'll sell. Writers and artists have to cultivate the women. They must like them as much as the ele-

vator starter in a department store. Artists—gee, I'd hate to be an artist's wife, especially a portrait painter. He has to cultivate the very rich, as they're the only ones who can afford to have their portraits painted, and he has to grab at every chance he gets to meet them. And women, it's women who want to see their faces on canvas, or have Willie's picture painted, although you wouldn't know it's them after it's done. If he's a clever artist, he cuts down the lines, takes the lumps out of mother's figure . . . . say, by the way, did you hear what Jimmie Elwood said to Mrs. Barry about her portrait made by that big dago that came over here? He looked at it for a time—she was all in red, and looked sporty—and then he said: 'Why did you have it painted?' She said: 'So that my children will look at it in after years and see what their mother looked like.' He studied it for a little time, then said: 'They'll wonder if they're legitimate.'"

"Peggy," said Eleanor, "you are dreadful. No decent girl should talk as you do. I'm ashamed of you."

"Good, Mother. Gives you a distinct sensation, shame does. Causes the blood to fill the capillaries, and you get a thrill. Perhaps not the kind you want, but any sensation is good; like whisky, all's good but some's better."

Beth, who always acted as the buffer between her mother and Peggy, said:

"Anything new at the party, Ninny?"

"Oh, yes. Hand me my bag, Beth. Thanks. Mrs. Thompson brought this little book and read it to us.

I borrowed it and brought it home, as I want to read it again. It's about Fanny Ward."

"Who's Fanny Ward? Pass the pie," said Tom.

Peggy pushed back her chair.

"Dad! Hole up, hedgehog, and don't come out till spring. Who's Fanny Ward! Can you beat it! Don't you read the papers? Why, she's the world's trouble-maker for husbands. Between her and Freud, you haven't a chance. Freud tells 'em to leave you if you aren't the true affinity, and Fannie Ward gives 'em a new face so's they can get another. Come out of it, Rip Van Winkle, come out of it."

Tom looked interested. "Gives 'em a new face? How does she do that?"

"Oh, she has some doctor that takes a tuck in here and there, puts a gusset where it's needed, does a little ironing—and there you are. Brand-new face, therefore brand-new woman, brand-new feelings, so must get brand-new man."

"But it's all true," said Eleanor seriously. "Mary Coleman was in Chicago and saw Fanny at the Coliseum. She did a song and dance, then gave a talk on beauty. Mary said that she had seen Miss Ward twenty-five years ago and she looked much older than she does now. She's sixty-two and doesn't look over twenty-five."

"Powder and rouge," said Tom.

"No, it wasn't makeup at all. After the talk from the stage, Miss Ward came out in the lobby and stood on a chair and allowed the women to come right up

to her and examine her. Mary said she hadn't a line in her neck and her face was as smooth as a young girl's, and she was not made up as much as the average woman does for the street."

"Yes, we must hand it to her," said Peggy. "She's delivered the goods and she's caught a young husband with it and has two beauty parlors, one in London and one in Paris, and I guess has a longing eye on America, or she wouldn't have made that hard vaudeville trip across the continent."

Peggy rose from the chair, and coming across to her mother, put her arm around her shoulder. Eleanor was reading the little booklet and did not notice her daughter. Then Peggy bent down and gave her mother a kiss. "Good-night, Mother. You're going to the movies." She looked down at the picture of Miss Ward on the book. "She *is* pretty, isn't she? I bet all you dames didn't talk of anything else except how to get a new face. Take a lot of women together and within three throws it's how to grow young, or how to take off fat. Did you hear of a new diet? That tomato and boiled egg diet nearly finished you."

"Peggy——"

"Restrain yourself, Mother. I'm off."

"Where are you going?"

"Never mind, dear heart. I'm going to the Christian Endeavor—perhaps *not*!"

That evening Tom had a peaceful time. He sat between two old friends, and slept through the whole performance. The women did not nudge him; he was

not their husband, so they left him alone. He awoke in time for the funny picture and, feeling refreshed, enjoyed it immensely. They went to his drugstore, where he *treated* them all to an icecream soda, then they separated.

CHAPTER III

ELEANOR went to her own room. It had taken years of coaxing to get Tom to agree to twin beds. Then another term of years pleading insomnia and nerves and he had agreed to the separate rooms. But, as he said: "It isn't chummy, Nell. You can't talk. I often think of something I want to say to you, or think of a funny story I'd like to tell you and we'd have a good laugh together. But you're way over there in another room and I decide to tell you in the morning, but by that time I've forgotten it. I think if people would sleep together in the good old-fashioned way, there wouldn't be so many divorces. In one big bed, you kind o' cuddle up and tell stories and laugh, and even if you're mad at each other, you make up."

But Eleanor had her way. She had her own room, where she could pass as much time as she pleased with cold cream and the many condiments that she rubbed into and out of her face before she was ready for sleep.

She did the usual manipulations with her face and neck, then slipped into bed and, turning on the bed lamp, started again to read the book so cleverly gotten up by Fanny Ward or her press agent.

As she was finishing it, Tom came into the room. He wore the old-fashioned nightshirt and was rather

proud that he had not succumbed to pajamas. He delighted in telling the old, old story of the deaf man who was asked by the beautiful lady at the party if he liked bananas. "Heh?" the deaf man asked. The lady raised her voice. "Do you like bananas?" "No, I wear the old-fashioned nightshirt," the man replied. Tom loved that story, and would tell it with great glee, ending up by saying: "That's like me. Old-fashioned nightshirt." He did not make a beautiful picture as he stood before Eleanor. Tom was getting a little stout, his face was round and florid, and his hair was thin. If you missed the kindness in that face, or the clear eyes that looked at you so frankly, you might say that Tom Wakefield was not good to look upon. Eleanor eyed him as he stood at the foot of her bed, and decided that Tom was a good husband, but that he was not romantic-looking, at least in a nightshirt.

She did not like to be interrupted in her reading and the train of thought the booklet brought to her, so she said rather crossly:

"What do you want, Tom?"

"I want to talk to you about Beth. I heard she was engaged to Fred. Has she said anything to you?"

"Engaged to Fred? Why, she hasn't said anything. She'd tell me, I'm sure."

"Well, I just wanted to know. He's rather wild, and I don't know as I care to have Beth marry him. She don't seem his kind. I should think he'd take to Peggy more. Keep your eyes open about it."

Tom turned to go and his eye fell on the book in Eleanor's hand.

"Reading that thing again?"

Eleanor frowned, then she said: "Tom, let me talk to you."

"What about? It's late."

"Sit down and let me talk to you."

Tom grumbled something to himself and then picked out the most comfortable chair and started to sit down.

Eleanor said: "Move it up here by the bed, facing me, so's we can talk."

Tom moved the chair and sat down heavily.

"Fire away. What is it, want more allowance? Can't do it, Eleanor. You and the girls are expensive this year."

"No, it isn't that, Tom. But it's something I've been thinking of for a long time. I want to go to New York or Paris and have my face lifted."

Tom started to rise, then sat down again and stared at her in a stupefied way. "My God—what's that?"

"Just what I said, Tom. I want to have my face lifted and the wrinkles taken out. Look at that picture of Fanny Ward. She's sixty-two years old, and look at her, Tom, look at her." Eleanor sat up and forced the book into Tom's hand.

Tom stared at it, turned the book over, and then turned back and looked at the pretty face staring up at him.

"Well, what's that got to do with you?"

"Why, Tom, if she can have it done, why can't any woman? She says it isn't necessary to grow old."

Tom slouched down in his chair.

"Have I got to hear that all over again? Eleanor, why can't you be happy like other women, like Helen Terry, for example? She's not worrying about growing old."

"No, and look at her. You wouldn't want me to look like her, would you?"

"You couldn't if you tried. You was made good-looking to begin with. But Jim's satisfied."

"Yes, that's what is killing me. I was pretty, I was lovely, and you know it, Tom. And I'm getting old and I can't bear it. No, don't interrupt me, Tom. Let me say for once what I feel."

Eleanor sat up on the edge of the bed. Her low-necked nightdress showed her rounded neck, the shaded light softened the discontented lines in her face. To Tom, who sat and stared at her—he thought she looked good enough for any one. Why should she be always worrying about her age? He liked her as she was.

"I won't grow old, Tom. You don't understand. Me, the real me, is still a girl. I am younger than either of the girls. I—I—don't seem to have ever grown up. I'm always waiting for an adventure around the corner—and it hasn't come and it won't come if I get old. I can't bear it, Tom, I can't bear it."

"What do you want, a love affair?"

"No, no, Tom, it isn't that. I don't know exactly what I want except—well, I nearly go crazy when

the girls are getting ready to go to some club or party. I watch them and sometimes I hate them. I— I— Oh, I can't say what I mean——"

A flush came to Tom's cheek and an angry glint to his eyes.

"I can tell you what you mean, Eleanor, you and a lot of fool women like you. You're discontented because you've not got enough to do. You was happy when you were doing your own work and bringing up the kids and taking care of me. You ain't got enough to do."

"Why, Tom, I'm so busy I don't have time enough to think."

"Busy at *what*? At trying to have a good time. Instead of cooking for your man, you've got a girl and you leave it all to her. Instead of doing things for the girls, you have it all done for them or they do it for themselves. You don't go to the market any more; you order by telephone. You just gad around at lunches and bridges and teas and these darned dances, thinking you're having a good time, while all the time——"

A knock was heard at the door and it was pushed open and Peggy's face appeared in the opening.

"Can I come in? I saw the light. Not having a family fight, are you?"

"No, come in, Peg," growled Tom. "Your mother's crazy, plumb crazy."

"What's the matter, old dear? Heard a lecture by a Swami, who tells you how to live the true love life,

or are you going to elope with Rafaelo? You went to see him tonight, didn't you?"

"Aw, cut him out. Your mother wants to have her face lifted," said Tom, in an angry, disgusted voice.

Peggy, who was starting for the door, whirled around and looked at her father, then at her mother.

"What?"

"That's what she said, wants to have her face lifted. Can you beat it?"

Peggy came slowly towards the bed.

"What is it, Mother?"

"Well—Tom's a brute for telling you, but it's the truth."

"Have your face lifted? What's the matter with your face?" Then her eyes fell on the book in her father's hands. "Oh, I see; Fanny's got you, too."

Eleanor tossed her head and said: "Well, why not? If she could have it done, why couldn't any one else?"

"Yes, but Mother, she's an actress."

"Can't I feel because I am not an actress? Is it only actresses that want to stay beautiful?"

"But you are beautiful, Mother. There's nobody of your age in town can compare with you."

"Of my age, yes. But why my age? Why should I look my age?"

"Why shouldn't you? If you're forty-eight, why shouldn't you look forty-eight? I don't see the point."

"I do. I won't get old. I'm forty-eight; in five years I will be an old woman; in ten years an old hag."

"Nothing doin', Mother, you'll never be an old hag. Keep young in spirit and you'll never grow old." Peggy went to the foot of the bed and looked at her mother. "Mother—what's the matter with you, anyhow? Now, let's be serious—what is it you want?"

"I've told you, I don't want to look old."

"Oh, fudge! Everybody grows old, and looks old. All your friends are growing old with you, and they're happy."

"They are *not* happy. Every woman is discontented when she sees herself growing old."

"Discontented lot of women, because they've not got enough to do. I've just been telling your mother, Peg, that the trouble is they haven't enough to do," growled Tom.

"And I've told you, Tom, that I never was busier in my life," Eleanor said angrily.

"Dad's right, Ninny. You're not doing the right thing. You're playing at being busy and you're doing nothing. All of these bridge teas and things, and dances—it's the wrong thing. You're trying to be society women, when the trouble is you come of generations of women who have kept their home, done their own housework, brought up their children, and done something constructive. Now you try to go against that inheritance and you go bump. That's the cause of most of the nervous breakdowns, Dr. Caldwell told me the other day, women trying to live lives that are against everything they have inherited. All of you 'society' women are just plain, ordinary women,

made for wives and mothers, and you try to pull the Duchess stuff and live as if you were born to it. It takes several generations to make a 'lady,' if lady means doing nothing but trying to have a good time. You can't jump in the middle of it and land right. I'm fed up on the whole thing!" She started for the door.

Tom stopped her. "Let's settle this face-lifting business. That's kinda got my goat. Face lifted. Hell!"

Peggy came back. "Well, give me a cigarette. She's only joking, Dad."

An obstinate look came into Eleanor's face. A look that they both knew. Peggy gave her a keen glance, then settled down in a chair, crossed her legs and started puffing her cigarette.

"You were just talking, weren't you, Mother? Reassure Dad, so he can withdraw his graceful form from our view." She looked at her father critically. "Dad, you're no sheik in your night clothes. Why not get a pair of spiffy pajamas and give Mother a thrill?"

"Oh, shut up, Peg. I'm sore at all this 'young' business. I want to have it out and never hear of it again. Your mother's got something on her chest, let her get it off, and then we can have some peace."

Peggy turned to her mother.

"Dad's right, Ninny. You've been making life rather miserable for us all this last year, what with dieting and beauty doctors and Swamis and Freud— Clear the atmosphere. Spill it. What do you want your face lifted for?"

"Why shouldn't I? I don't want to look old, I'm telling you."

"Yes, but you *are* old," said Peggy with the frankness of youth. "What do you want to be young for—want a beau?"

"You know better than that, but—but—I like youth. I like to dance with boys. Old men make me sick."

"And I suppose you think young men hunger after women of your age? Don't you suppose they feel the same about dancing with you as you do about dancing with old men? They're human, if they are young."

"It's different. Young men like older women, they are more interesting."

"Oh, they've pulled that stuff on you, have they? Well, take it from me, it's all bosh. A young man likes a young girl; he don't like to dance with a woman old enough to be his mother, if he's normal, or isn't looking to borrow money or get a meal ticket."

"But a lot of women go around with young men; they take them to dances and the cabarets and——"

"Yes, and the old bird pays the check, doesn't she? I'd like to be under the bed when Johnny goes to his hall bedroom and talks to himself."

"Oh, Peggy, you don't understand."

"No, I don't understand, and I presume I won't until I'm forty-eight myself. But take it from me, Mother, when I *am* forty-eight I ain't going round trying to scare up a flirtation with a boy young enough to be my son."

She was quiet for a time.

"Mother, why can't women be satisfied with having all the boys like 'em and not try to be kittenish with them? I was out driving with Margaret Tyndall and we stopped to talk with George Wright, and she fussed up and made eyes at him and acted like a darned fool. She's just sex crazy. She changes the minute a man looms in sight, even if it's the iceman. And she's older than you are. George'd be all right for a son-in-law, but——hell, as Father says."

Eleanor started from the bed and began walking up and down the room. Her face worked pitifully and Peggy and Tom saw that she was on the verge of tears. Tom started to go to her, but Peggy stopped him. "No, Father, let Mother have it out. You'll promise anything if she cries, and I think you ought to put a stop to this nonsense. First thing we know some one will get hold of her and have her peeled or something terrible."

They watched her for a moment, then Peggy said:

"Mother, stop prancing around. What's the matter with you? You ought to be the happiest woman on earth. You got Dad, who's a fool about you; you got a nice home; you got all the people eating out of your hand; you got two wonderful and beautiful and obedient children—what more do you want?"

"What more do I want? You wouldn't understand if I told you. I've missed out in something. Yes, I got Tom, and he is a good husband. But, Peggy, although your father is a wonderful man in his way, well—you wouldn't want to be married to him. He's

just satified with his work and his home, and cares for nothing except to eat three meals a day and read the *Saturday Evening Post* or play casino—oh, that dreadful game! Sometimes when I see him bring out those cards, I think I'll scream or kill him or something."

"Oh, it's that, is it? Dad's not exciting enough. You want a little red pepper in life. He ought to give you a licking once in a while and you'd get over the idea that he doesn't represent romance in your young life."

Tom spoke. "Eleanor, I think I know what you mean. It is true, you've had a stupid life with me. I've had to work hard, had to keep long hours, and when I come home, I want to stay home. And I don't read uplifting literature, because I'm tired. And I do like to play casino—I don't have to think a lot. I guess it's all my fault."

Eleanor started to cry and came to Tom and put her arm around his neck and her face against his head. He reached up and patted her hand.

"Don't say that, Tom. I do love you; it isn't that. But I—I—well, I am selfish and mean—I have always had admiration, and it is so hard to give up. There isn't even the thought of another man—I just want ——"

Tom stroked the hand he held. "I understand, Nell. You feel you've not had enough excitement in your life. I'm sorry I can't give it to you; I'd do anything to make you happy."

Peggy rose. "Well, I see Mother's going to have

her face lifted if she wants it. *Good*-night." And she left the room.

Tom pulled Eleanor down on his lap.

"Aren't you happy with me, Nellie?"

"Oh, Tom, you know it isn't that. But I want to keep on being happy. I want to keep young; I don't want to grow old."

"Well, it can't be helped. We must all grow old."

"Yes, but we don't have to *look* old, Tom. Now, listen to me, dear," and she snuggled her face into his neck. "Let me look this thing up. If there's anything in it, can't I try it?"

"Eleanor, don't be a fool."

"But, Tom, why is it foolish? Science has done so many things, why not this? Look at me, Tom," and she rose and stood in front of him. "See, if I draw the flesh back here, see how it makes my neck and chin smooth. It sags now; if this was away it wouldn't."

Tom looked at her critically. "Yes, it does make a difference, but——"

"No buts, Tom. And see these lines around the eyes—they can all be taken away. They take up the flesh and make a little cut behind the ears and it don't show, and the face is round and smooth where it hung down before, and—and—they do a lot of things. I've been reading about DeWolf Hopper's wife, and Eva Tanguay and a lot of others, and it is just wonderful, Tom. And quite a long time ago, when it was first started, I saw in a paper where a New York doc-

tor made over a singer's face and she was so beautiful that he fell in love with her and married her. It can be done, Tom."

"Yes—but——"

Eleanor saw he was weakening.

"Oh, Tom, let me find out about it. Let me go and have it done if it is all right."

Tom hesitated. "But it must be awfully expensive, Nell."

"Yes, but I'll save on something. I'd do anything, go without anything, to try it."

"But, Nell, I couldn't this year, anyway. The girls cost so much money."

"Yes, I know. But they'll be married one of these days, then we can live much cheaper. Oh, Tom, I'll save, I'll give up my car—anything."

"Well—I wouldn't want you to have to do that. Perhaps sometime—I want to make you happy, Nell, and if you're unhappy because you don't like your face——"

Eleanor beamed. "You are a dear, Tom. I'll find out about it, and some day—not too long—I mustn't get too old. You will let me, Tom."

Tom rose from his chair and sighed the sigh of a man driven into a corner. He knew Eleanor and he knew it was useless to argue. Then, he was truthful in saying that he wanted to make her happy. That had been his weakness with her: he had so wanted her to be happy. He kissed her and started for his room.

"We won't cross a bridge till we get to it. We've got the girls on our hands and they and the house take everything I can make."

"But, Tom, if they get married, or Peggy goes to work, as she says she wants to."

Tom stopped. "But that one thing I don't want her to do. Why should she work? Taking bread out of some poor girl's mouth. I'm able to take care of my girls."

"But they may get married——"

"Well, that's different; if they get married, we can talk about it. But that's a long time off: you'll get over the idea by that time."

Eleanor laughed. "Never, Tom. I'm obsessed with the thing."

"You're possessed with the devil," and Tom laughed, although rather bitterly, as he left the room.

CHAPTER IV

One evening about two weeks later, Peggy walked into the dining-room, where the family were having dinner. She was followed by a very good-looking young man who seemed a little ill at ease. But not Peggy. She walked up to the table and said:

"Dad, Mother, I want you to meet my husband."

There was silence as they all stared. Then Eleanor gave a gasp, as recognition of the young man came to her.

"Why—why—it's the milkman!"

Peggy laughed.

"Yes, it's the milkman."

The young man flushed as he saw the expression on the three faces.

"Didn't I tell you?" she said to him. "You're a sensation, for once in your life, Jimmie." Then, turning to the others, looking first at her father and then at her mother:

"Well—can't you wish us joy or whatever is the usual thing when loved daughter takes unto herself a husband?"

Eleanor tried to speak. Her face was red, then white, her throat worked, but no words came from her lips. Tom looked at the very stalwart young

man, and then their eyes met and he laughed. "The milkman, well, I'll be damned."

Peggy flushed and an angry light came to her eyes. "Yes, I've told you he's the milkman, but he also is my husband. We were married this afternoon at four-thirty."

Eleanor found her voice, and a torrent broke forth. "What do you mean, Margaret, by doing a thing like this? Why didn't you ask us? Why did you go off this way and disgrace us? What will people say? I—I——"

Peggy drew a chair up to the table and sat down, her hands on the table in front of her. "Sit down, Jim, over there opposite me and we can face the thing and have it out. Because if I know the signs we've got something before us." Turning to her mother, she said:

"We will take your questions in order, Mother. 'Why did I do such a thing?' The same reason all girls do such things. I wanted to get married. 'Why didn't I ask you?' Because I knew you would object, and what was the use of quarreling with you and spoiling our happiness. 'Why did I go off in this way and disgrace you?' I don't consider that I have disgraced you. We prefer to get married in our own way, and not have a lot of fuss made about it. If you had given in, after a lot of wrangling, you would have wanted a big show, and we didn't want that. Dad can't afford it, for one thing, and I don't believe in it, for another. 'What will people say?' Nothing. People have their

own business to attend to and they don't care whom I marry, nor how I marry him, just so's I'm married. And why should we care what they say, anyway?"

Tom said: "Peggy, why didn't you come to me? I'm your father. You should have come to us for advice. Your mother and I know what is best for you. You should have come to us and talked it over, instead of going off in this sneaky way."

"We haven't sneaked," answered Peggy. "And why should I come to you for advice about marriage? You've made a mess of it. Are you and Mother happy? Not a bit of it. Mother's discontented, miserable, making every one miserable around her. You are unhappy because Mother's unhappy."

Eleanor sat up and the red covered her face.

"Peggy, leave the room. I've heard enough. I will never consent to this marriage. I will never receive the—the—milkman as my son. I've never been so humiliated in my life."

"Mother——"

"I will not listen to you, Margaret. I am through with you——"

Peggy started to say something and Jim came to her and stood with his hand on her shoulder.

"Mother——"

"I will not listen to you. I cannot understand you. You disrespectful, good-for-nothing girl."

"Mother——"

"No, I won't listen to you. I've given my life to bringing you girls up. I've given you every advan-

tage—you have been given the finest education, we have saved and done everything so that you could go to the best schools, you have had more than most girls of our town, you've dressed the best, you've been allowed to visit girls all over the country, Palm Beach, Miami Beach, California—we've done everything for you. You have had the best Christian training a home could give, and now you reward us by marrying the milkman. The milkman! I will never forgive you as long as I live."

Margaret listened to the tirade, and as she grew angry, you could see that the two women facing each other were mother and daughter. They each had a temper that they had not been trained to control.

Margaret started to speak.

"Mother——"

Eleanor rose slowly from her chair and, without looking at Peggy, walked out of the room.

There was a silence. Tom looked down at his plate and played with his knife. Margaret seemed for the moment about to cry. Beth was the only self-possessed one. She said sarcastically:

"Well, you've done it."

There was a silence, then Peggy said:

"Well, perhaps I was cruel. But I've thought so much about this thing, life and marriage, and—and—Won't you say something, Dad——?"

Finally Tom said: "Well, as he is in the family, just who is he besides being the milkman?"

Peggy laughed; but before she could answer, the

pantry door opened and Jenny, the general servant, came in. She stared at Jim for a moment, recognition in her eyes, then she stolidly placed the dish on the table and started to go out of the room.

Peggy called to her: "Jenny, come back." Jenny turned and came towards the table. "Jenny, who is this man?" pointing to Jim, who had again sat down by Tom.

"Sure, it's the milkman from the Lakeview Farms."

"Do you know him, Jenny?"

"I'm not what you might call intimate with him, but I see him once in a while in the mornings, if I'm up."

"Well, Jenny, I hope you approve of my young man, because the milkman is my husband now. We were married this afternoon."

Jenny was plainly astounded and said nothing for a moment; then she laughed and a twinkle came into her Irish eyes.

"I don't know nothing about his moral character, but I know his milk's good, his butter's the best, and there ain't no cream in the country that can come up to Lakeview cream, and they don't stint in measure."

She took the hand that Peggy held out and then Jim gave her a hearty handshake and said: "Now, Jenny, you'll have to give me a cup of coffee once in a while when I come around in the cold mornings."

When Jenny left the room, Peggy turned to her father.

"There, Dad, you're answered partially. He is a

milkman and a good one . . . . Be the best in your line, whatever that line. But that is only his business, and I presume for the sake of future posterity, his antecedents should be known. I believe in eugenics myself. His name is James Hamilton, his father is James Hamilton Osborne, his mother was Susan Kirkwood, now Mrs. James Hamilton Osborne, of Lakeview Farm, about ten miles from our town. They have a farm of three hundred acres, good rich land, all under cultivation except the woodland—I cannot tell how many acres there are in that, but I will get the exact data; they have a dairy and they supply this town with milk—good milk."

"But where did you meet him, Margaret?" asked Beth. "At the back door?"

"No, Beth. I met him at Miami Beach last year when I visited Sybil Stallings. He was there with his uncle, who has some kind of an experimental station, and I first saw him at a dinner dance at the Flamingo Hotel. He can wear a dinner coat as well as blue jeans."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since I first saw Jim—about a year, I presume."

"But, Peg, why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you bring him here? Were you ashamed of him?" asked Tom.

"Not in the least, Dad. But I know Mother and I knew she'd throw a fit because he delivers milk at the back door. So what's the use of arguing."

"But—but—why does he deliver the milk? Can't he hire some one to do that? It's disgraceful," said Beth.

"Sure they hire men to deliver the milk, but Jim does anything that is necessary around the place. If they need a man to deliver the milk, Jim does it. If they want an extra hand on the farm, Jim goes in. He is a farmer, and——" Peggy laughed—— "I'm a farmer's wife, from now on henceforth, amen."

Beth looked at her as she sat there in her dainty clothes, her beautifully manicured hands loosely clasped and resting on the table in front of her.

"You—a farmer's wife?" she sneered.

"Certainly, why not? I don't expect to milk the cows, there are four hundred of them and I'm a slow milker, but I do expect to do whatever is required of the farmer's wife, the modern farmer. Jim don't expect me to churn the butter, nor rake the hay, but I expect to do my share. Jim's father is handing the place over to him—they want to travel a bit and winter in Florida—and we both expect to make it pay and we're going to pull together and do what ever is necessary to do."

"What an awful life!" said Beth. "What an awful life!"

Peggy flushed.

"Cut out the tragic tone, Beth. Why should it be an awful life?"

"A farmer's wife, buried in the country. No social life——"

"That's the rub with you. Social life. Now you got me goin'. I want a chance to say what I think about what you call a social life. I've sat on the side lines and watched this thing for four years. I saw what you call the social life in Miami for a full season, where all the rich come that you little small town people try to imitate with your bridge luncheons and your teas and your dinner and supper dances. Down there they really do the thing, they have the money, or if they haven't it, they make a noise as if they had it. If you are socially elect, you spend your days and nights going from lunches to teas at the hotels, where each hostess wants to have as many people as she can get together. Then you go to a dinner and then perhaps to a supper dance. All lovely—beautiful clothes, beautiful women, beautiful drinks—it would be wonderful if it only happened once in a while. But it's every day and every day and every night and every night, so that instead of looking forward to a good time, when you get an invitation, the poor, popular lady says: 'Oh, Lord, another! Well, I must go, I presume,' instead of saying: 'Isn't it wonderful! Mary's giving a party; I must look up my best dress or get a new one,' and then look forward to the party. Now, I'm going to go to parties, Beth, but I'm not going to so many of them that I am fed up. I'm going to look forward to it, going to buy a new dress perhaps, and I'm going to have such a good time that I'll have to stay in bed all the next day to get over it. Then I'm not going to another right away—I'm going

to wait until I feel a longing for a party. I'm going to give them, too; we've fixed up the old barn and put down a dancing floor, and we're going to give *some* party, when we give it. Don't think I'm going into a convent."

"But—but—you've fixed up the barn, you say. Have you been planning this marriage a long time?" asked Tom.

"Yes, ever since Miami. But we wanted to get acquainted—you can't get acquainted on yachts and at dances and with mobs of people around you all the time. I've been out to Jim's home a couple of times a week——"

"But why didn't you tell us and take us out?"

"I've told you before that I didn't want to have Mother fussing about Jim being a farmer and me sacrificing my life. And Mother'd fit in with Jim's mother about as well as a peacock in a chicken yard. Mother Osborne would think she was a huzzy with her rouge and lip-stick and cigarette. Hoped to break her in gradually. Let her know me, then I'd spring Dad, who's human, and you, and gradually work up to Mother."

Peggy reached over and patted Tom's hand. "No, it sounds worse than it means, Dad. I love Mother dearly and understand her and that all this youthful stuff is only play, that she is acting a little part that pleases her for the time, and I've always been hoping that she'd get over it. But truly, Mother Osborne wouldn't understand her. And—and—our courtship

has been so sweet, so lovely, that I didn't tell you about anything, so that nothing would spoil it. It's been something that we're going to remember all our lives."

They were all silent. Then Jim said:

"I hope, Mr. Wakefield, you and Mrs. Wakefield will come out soon. Peggy does not mean what she says: I am sure Mother will be fond of you all. I—I—want her to know—I—I want us to be friends—I understand you are disappointed—but—but—Peggy and I are going to be very happy——"

Peggy rose: "Happy isn't the word; we're going to scintillate."

Beth, who had gone into another room to answer the telephone, returned in time to say: "Well, there's always divorce——"

Peggy whirled around.

"Not for us, understand, not for us. We neither one of us believe in divorce or companionate marriage or any of those things. We're married for keeps. We've talked it all over and we've decided that if things don't go right, we'll talk it over and find out why. If we're not getting the kick out of marriage, physically, spiritually, or mentally, we're going to find out why. We're going to treat our marriage the same as we would treat a motor car. If it don't work, get down and find out what's the matter with the engine. There is no reason why we shouldn't get everything out of life. We should hit it off sexually——"

Tom gave a shocked: "Peggy!"

"Yes, sexually. That is one of the main causes of trouble in married life. They treat it as if it was something to be ashamed of. It isn't the dinner, nor the whole meal of life, but it's the dessert and the coffee and should not be left out. Jim and I've read a lot of books and we've talked over the thing——"

Beth's face was a study. Peggy looked at her closely for a moment, then her own face flushed, and she said in a low voice:

"I know what you're thinking, Beth. No, Jim and I have not experimented in any way. We've left that, because we want to begin our new life right and beautiful, and if we had done what we both consider wrong, although it may not be from any standpoint except our old training—well, it would take something of the beauty away."

She was quiet, looking at her father as if waiting for him to speak. There was a longing look in her eyes and a beseeching note in her voice as she said:

"Dad, don't be shocked, and won't you understand? This means so much to us. We want our marriage to work. It ought to work. We're young, we're healthy, we're in love with each other. If there is going to be anything wrong, it will be with our technique, and we'll find out what it is. We won't just say that we are not affinities and perhaps try to find another, we'll *make* ourselves affinities."

After a moment's silence she said:

"And—and—we're both alike on—on what you

might call the spiritual thing. It's hard—it's hard—" and Peggy looked down a little embarrassedly, then she looked up and threw back her head a little defiantly. "You know, Dad, it's harder to talk about your spiritual or religious ideas than it is to talk about sex or any other subject. We're sort of brought up to think it is bad form to speak of Christ or God, but—Jim and I are going to find out about religion—find out about God, and although we're sort of on the fence about the Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection and some of the miracles, we're open to argument, and we're going to find out for ourselves. There must be something in religion, there must be something in God, or people for all times wouldn't make so much of it—and if it's worth while, we want it. We've got a lot of books by Fosdick and the new generation of preachers, and Jim's mother has a lot of the older things, and we're going to read them and find out. We're going to hit on all three cylinders, Spiritual, Physical and Mental."

Peggy rose and went to her father.

"Oh, Dad, can't you be nice and sweet to me—tonight—my marriage night? We so want to be happy! We love each other. Jim's a big, fine, clean man. You ought to be proud of him. We're going to live together all of our lives, and we're going to have big, fine, clean boys and girls—and—and we and our children are going to try to be the kind of people that are needed here in this good old America."

Tom's face softened. He loved this erratic, wayward girl of his, but—

Peggy put one hand on his shoulder and looked into his eyes.

"Dad, Jim and I have such great dreams—we want to make the world a little more beautiful just because we have met each other. We can't do it in a big way, of course, but we can commence where we are, around the farm and with our friends. You know the Mohammedans say: 'What comes to your doorstep is yours.' That means you don't have to go a long way off to look for things to do; it is brought to you. Oh, Dad, we are going to be so happy that everybody in the world will go and get married just because of Jim and me . . . . Please, Dad."

Tom drew the girl towards him and bent down and kissed her lips. There were tears in his kindly eyes, as he said: "My dear little girl!" He held her closely for a moment, then he turned and took Jim's hand. He moved a step from Peggy and placed his other hand on the boy's shoulder as he looked into his eyes. "You're all right, son; we're glad to have you." They stood a moment, then Tom went to the door.

"Nellie," he called. "Nellie, come down."

They waited, all looking towards the door. Finally a footstep was heard above, and Eleanor slowly descended the stairs and came into the room. She stopped and looked at the three faces before her. Tom went to her and took her hand.

"Nellie, Peggy is our daughter and we love her. Won't you go to her?"

Peggy held her hands towards her mother.

"Mother,——" was all she said, but there was a world of longing and love in the voice.

Eleanor looked at the daughter standing before her, a softened Peggy that she hardly knew; then the mother love overcame her anger and she started towards her quickly and took Peggy in her arms. As two women will, in times of emotional stress, they cried.

Finally Peggy stood back from her mother and went over to Jim and, taking his hand, brought him towards her mother. "Jim, too, Ninny. He's part of me, part of the family. You must include Jim."

Eleanor hesitated. She saw the milkman, not the man. She looked at the boy standing before her, at the anxious, tearful face of Peggy, then held out her hand to him and drew him to her and kissed him. "My son," she said; but it was enough for the waiting three who were watching her.

Beth went over to her sister. "Let me in on those parties, Peg," she said, and passing to her brother-in-law, stood back and looked him over critically, then laughed.

"Well, Peg always was a good picker."

CHAPTER V

Peggy had been married six months. The marriage had not occasioned the talk Eleanor feared. Peggy was right: people had their own affairs to think about, and except for a few shrugs, and pitying looks that such an unfortunate marriage had been made by the most charming, and to speak plainly, the wildest girl in town, the subject was forgotten. Eleanor had accepted it with as much grace as possible. "They" must not be allowed to say that she considered the match unfortunate. But in her heart she could never quite forgive Peggy. Peggy did not ask forgiveness, or anything else of her mother. She was gloriously happy, and gave parties in the renovated barn to which all the world went and were compelled to say they had a good time. Eleanor most thoroughly disapproved of Peggy coming to town from time to time with Jim on the milk wagon. But Peggy waved gaily to her friends as she passed, or stopped and talked with some girl in her car, and gave no more thought that she was doing something not done by her set, than if she were driving her own pretty car that Jim's father had given her for a wedding-present.

Eleanor was not well. She still insisted on going to every dinner or dance where she was invited, and her days were passed playing bridge. She would not

give up. When she arose in the morning nervous and pale, she took a nerve tonic that had been prescribed by the doctor who seemed to have all the nervous women in his charge, and applied the rouge a little more heavily.

One afternoon she was lying on the shaded porch, comfortably bolstered up with pillows on the chaise longue, when she saw Beth drive up with Fred Paige. She watched them as they sat in the car for a time, evidently saying a rather long adieu, then Beth came up the steps. She stopped as she saw her mother, and a flush came to her face.

"What! You home! I didn't know you were ever home in the afternoon."

"Yes, today. Mrs. Simmons' bridge tea is off; her mother is ill in Chicago, and she had to go away," said Eleanor.

Beth started to go into the house when Eleanor called her back.

"What do you want?" asked Beth.

"Beth, you are always with Fred. Is there anything in it, or are you just playing around? You must be careful; he—he—well, his playing might be dangerous."

Beth flushed again. She said as she took a seat facing her mother: "I presume I might as well tell you. Fred and I are engaged—we were going to tell you in a couple of days."

Eleanor sat up. "Engaged! To Fred Paige?"

Beth put her head back and an obstinate little line came around her mouth. "Yes, why not?"

"Well—I don't know—but I never thought of him in that way."

"He's all right, isn't he? At least he is not the milkman."

Eleanor laughed. Then she was quiet, seeming to consider this rather startling news that she had received.

"Of course, Beth, it is a good match. Fred is rich, his family are the best in town,—but—but—gossip says he has sown a lot of wild oats and is still sowing them. Aren't you afraid?"

Beth laughed. "No, Mother. I've thought it all out, perhaps a little cold-bloodedly. I love Fred, and I think he loves me. Anyway, he wants to marry me, and I think he'll go straight after we are married. At least he has promised me that he will. Then—then—he sort of fascinates me—his life is so different—he is so different—his friends he has here from Chicago and New York are different."

"But, Beth, would you care for that sporty crowd? Would you fit in?"

"I like them. I like Life, Mother, not vegetation. I couldn't bear to think of settling down like you and Father, I think it is awful. And Peg—I had just as soon be one of her cows, as live her life."

"But, Beth, Peggy has a very good time. She gives wonderful parties, every one goes and they all have a marvelous time. They are the most popular things

in town. I know she doesn't go to many things, but that is because she and Jim don't like them."

"Her parties are all right, Mother. For a time. They are the novelty now. But I want to give real things, with butlers and caterers and flowers, and orchestras and singers from Chicago—and—and—I want to do the thing right when I do it. I don't want any parties in a barn with the electricity hid in lanterns and calves mooing at you from the stalls and perhaps a flock of baby pigs scurrying across the dance floor. That's not my idea of a party—nor, to tell you the truth, is it yours, Mother."

Eleanor laughed. "Well, it's funny anyway, but I would never think of asking my friends to a stable—but Peggy asks them all and they—go."

"Yes, they go. But then she has a way with her that I haven't and I must do things big or people won't come to me. I am no fool, Mother; I know I'm not clever and if I expect people to come to me, I must give them something—fine food and expensive entertainment—or they'll stay at home. Now if I marry Fred, I can do all the things I have dreamed of doing. He is going to buy the Boynton house——"

Eleanor opened her eyes. "The Boynton house—the biggest home in town."

"Yes, Fred likes to entertain, and we are going to *live,* Mother. Fred and I are going to show you people a few things. You'll all have to sit up and take notice of your dear child."

Eleanor looked at her daughter for a few moments.

"Beth, I never knew you had it in you."

"Perhaps I had it only well concealed. Anyway, Fred has brought it out. I'm going to do a lot of things, Mother. Fred is giving me a beautiful Packard and I'm to have a chauffeur in livery, the same as his mother has. And we're going to have a butler, and—and—oh, well——"

"When do you want to get married?" asked Eleanor.

"That's what I want to talk over with you. Fred wants to get married right away, but I want to wait six months. He says he will not do it—so I thought we had better talk it over."

Eleanor, at a thought that came to her, sat up straight in the chair, then slowly sank back to the cushions. Tom had said that when both of the girls were married she could go to New York and try that beauty treatment. She had said nothing more about it, but the thought had been constantly in her mind. Each day as she had made up her face, as she scrutinized the lines around the eyes, the sagging cheeks, the incipient roll under the chin, she had thought of the magic operation that made women young and beautiful again. Eleanor was obsessed with the fear of old age. It was with her night and day. She desired, above all else in the world, to remain beautiful, to be young. She rebelled at being relegated to the mother set at the dances. She almost disliked the friends of her own age, as she felt she could see in them what she was becoming. To be young again, to be admired because of her beauty, not brains nor social position, but just

because she was again beautiful—that was her one dream.

If Beth was married, and soon—— Then she would be free. She smiled at Beth, who was waiting for her mother to talk over the question of time. If the girl only knew how much the mother desired this marriage. Eleanor would have liked to shriek: "Get married tomorrow, Beth."

Instead she said: "Well, there is no use in putting it off too long. If Fred wants it, I should try to please him, Beth."

"I presume so. When do you say?"

"I must give an announcement affair first——"

"No, never mind that, Mother. Let's spread it all on one thing. I want a big wedding. I want to go to New York for my clothes and the bridesmaids' dresses and everything. I don't want a small-town wedding."

"But, Beth, perhaps your father won't like it. I don't know whether he can afford it."

"Mother, he'll have to. He'll do it if you go at him the right way. Tell him I am the only daughter, Peggy didn't cost anything, and tell him he'll not have any more expense with me. I'll be off his hands completely—you make him see it."

Eleanor did not know whether she wanted Tom to see it to the extent that he might say he could not afford to send her to New York for her heart's desire, yet she liked to give an affair that would make her little

world talk. Yes, she would see what could be done with Tom.

"I will try with your father, and—we might be able to go to New York together and get your things. I will see."

Beth left satisfied. Eleanor sat a long time in the chaise longue, thinking of the possibilities opened up to her by Beth's marriage. She had not dared to even hope that things would happen so fortunately for her. When Tom had said that he might consider her proposition after the girls were married, there was no likelihood of their being married for at least a few years, and now within six months they would both be in their homes, no more care, no more expense. And New York! She could go to New York with Beth for the ostensible purpose of getting her trousseau, while at the same time she could look up the doctor that was being made famous among women by his facial operations. She could see him, let him look at her, and if he said that he could do what his pamphlets claimed he could, that is, make a woman of forty-eight into a girl of twenty-five, bring back the youth and beauty that was fast fleeing—Eleanor sat up. She would make an appointment with him, and after the wedding she would return.

Eleanor picked up her book and, like one in a daze, walked slowly upstairs.

She felt, although she did not put it into words, that the gods were with Eleanor Wakefield.

CHAPTER VI

ELEANOR and Beth went to New York. Tom had been generous. The two women passed the days in the shops and with dressmakers, milliners and the many people who cater to the vanity of women. Fred Paige had sent word to two of his friends, who came to the hotel to call on Fred's fiancée, expecting to see a couple of country women who would be of no interest to them. Beth was a beauty and the excitement and love of spending money for the first time kept a flush to her cheeks and a light in her eyes that made her most attractive to the two blasé New Yorkers. Consequently, instead of simply paying a duty call and perhaps taking them out to lunch, they decided to give these two unsophisticated ones a taste of the night life of New York. They went from cabaret to cabaret, from theatre to movie show. Night was turned into day, but it was a new world to both of them and there seemed no limit to their enjoyment.

Eleanor watched the crowds in the gaudily decorated cabarets; she saw young women and their escorts, older women with young escorts, old men with young girls. But she did not see women of her age with men of their own age. Age needed youth to dance with them, to flirt with them, to help them keep up the illusion that they were still young. When Eleanor

sat alone at the tables waiting for Beth and her partner to return from a dance, she grew bitter. She saw the politeness in the young men who asked her to dance, and saw also the regretful look they threw at her daughter, and she knew that they were regretting that they must dance with "mother" instead of beautiful daughter. It was gall and wormwood to her. If there was anything under Heaven that would restore her lost beauty, and she had been much more beautiful than Beth, she would find it.

Eleanor and Beth had acquired the way of the night life habitué; they did not rise in the morning until eleven or twelve o'clock. But one morning Eleanor rose with the determination of seeking the doctor who had sent her his booklet in answer to her letter written him from home.

She found him on one of the quiet, residential streets, no sign on the house to indicate that it was the Mecca of women from all over the United States who were discontented and dissatisfied with themselves. A plain "Dr. Sherman" was on a copper plate on the door.

Eleanor was admitted by a very pretty maid and ushered into a waiting-room. She was nervous, but tried after a time, which seemed eternity to her, to read the magazines on the table. She could not concentrate, would take up one and look at the pictures, then lay it down and take another. At last she felt she could stand it no longer, and was on the point of leaving. The door opened and a pretty blonde woman

came into the room, and took a seat on one of the couches. She seemed perfectly at home, picked up *The New Yorker* and chuckled over it for a time, then turned her attention to Eleanor, who was plainly nervous and impatient.

Finally she drawled: "Have you an appointment with Dr. Sherman?"

Eleanor said: "No, I came to see him to have a talk with him, but—but—I think I won't wait. I'll come again."

"Oh, don't get restless, little one. He'll come in time. But it's part of their stunt to keep you waiting. Shows they're busy. I don't mind it—I'm used to waiting on the great ones." She laughed. "I'm in the movie business and waiting is our middle name, at first when we're beginning. I used to set in old Sig Cohen's waiting-room at the studio until—well—they could have made a good incubator out of me if they'd given me a few eggs. Are you one of the profesh?"

Eleanor shook her head.

"No? Well, it's a great business, and old Cohen sure had some movie studio. Did you ever see him?"

Again Eleanor shook her head.

The pretty woman opposite Eleanor was evidently ready to talk, and as she knew only one subject, the movies, she was delighted to find some one to whom she could tell of her experiences and not have to keep quiet to hear of her listener's experiences. She settled herself comfortably and said:

"You never heard of Cohen and his studio? Well

—well—where you been livin'? As I said, it was some studio, and Cohen was some bird. He was a great judge of chickens. He would spend his week-ends in New York—his studio was in Philadelphia—and how he must have kidded those poor dumb Doras. Each little bum chorine after listening to his con talk saw herself the Bernhardt of the screen. And she began to count how much it cost to go to Phily.

"Cohen would return to his studio Monday morning. Outside his office was a long bench to hold applicants. I know it; I've set there until I know each grain in the wood. Our Monday morning indoor sport was making wagers how many chickens would be roosting on that bench by noon. And they were there, tall girls and small girls, stout girls and slim girls, all pretty, until that bench gave a sitting imitation of Ziegfeld's Follies. Cohen would hide in his office, drinking champagne all day to keep up his moral courage, no doubt. Orders were that he had not returned and no one knew when he would return.

"Tuesday found a few less waiting, Wednesday still fewer, and by Friday most of those future stars of the silver screen had returned to the three a day."

Eleanor said nothing and the actress gave a great sigh and said, "Well, it's a great life if you don't weaken."

Eleanor murmured a low assent; she did not know what to say to this woman who evidently lived in another world.

Finally the actress said: "I guess I'll slide along.

I only came in to let the doctor look over his handiwork. He done a good job with me and wants to see me from time to time. Sort of on probation, you know; let the probation officer look you over from time to time and see if any of the stitches have pulled."

Eleanor looked at the woman with interest. "Are you one of Dr. Sherman's patients?"

"Sure. Did you suppose I came here for a social visit? I'm too busy to fool away my time."

Eleanor looked at her closely, thoughtfully. "What —what—did Dr. Sherman do to you?" she rather shyly asked, feeling that perhaps the woman would resent the personal question.

The actress laughed. "Do to me? He took me apart and put me together again. He took a face of fifty and made it what you see. Pretty good, heh? I get by with thirty, now. Then he sent me to another doctor who took off about fifty pounds, and, behold the result. A flapper. No girl has it on me when it comes to figure. But it's some work, sister, believe me; it's a dog's life. I eat nothing but a lettuce leaf—am growing rabbit teeth—and I go to bed with the chickens so my face has a chance to rest. I don't laugh too hard, and I don't cry. I dassent get mad, and, well, my character's reformed as well as my face. 'Cause emotions are the devil when you're stitched up behind the ears. Every time I want to get mad and cuss some one out, I swallow hard and remember what it cost to be a beauty, and that I can't afford another operation for some time, so I lead the placid

life. I'm like a Jersey cow: I chew my cud slowly and in peace, and take all my satisfaction in looking in the glass and remembering I'm drawing down a nice little salary as the her-o-ine instead of the her-o-ine's mother."

"Is it—is it—expensive?" asked Eleanor.

"Expensive and then some. But believe me, dearie, it's worth it. Going to try it?"

"I—I—don't know. I am so much older than you that I don't know whether anything could be done."

"What's that? Older than me? Why, forget that, old dear. Knowest that for years I was the official mother in the old Cohen films. That is why I changed my name after Dr. Sherman had this old phiz lifted, tied and generally repaired. I didn't want the dear public to remember me."

She looked at Eleanor critically. "You ain't so bad, not damaged beyond repair. I had led the life and my face showed it. I looked ten years older than you do. My face hung down like a setter pup's, and it sunk in where it ought to stick out. I had jowls and my eyes couldn't be seen, and my neck was wrinkles where the fat sagged. I sure was some baby."

"But—but—you are lovely now."

"Yes, I'm his prize advertisement, and it nearly kills him that I won't let him use my face on the booklets, nor have me set around letting prospective patients look at me, with a picture showing before takin'. I ought to charge him commission for talking to you. But——" and she looked at a jeweled wrist-

watch on her arm, "I must be going. I'm working this afternoon, and they start shooting exactly at two." As she gathered up her bag she said: "Do you see the films? I'm in that new one at the Capitol, 'The Lady and the Tiger.' Not bad, and it won't hurt your grey matter to watch it for a hour. It won't make you think. Give the doctor my love—I'm Mildred Lee, officially. Mildred Long, privately, with a husband and four children to support. Nobody works but Mother in our family. Good-by; don't get cold feet. Make Daddy dig down in his jeans and give Mother a new face. He'll like it after it's done. You might as well be the chicken that keeps him as let another chicken get him. Here's my card. Come and see me some time. I'd like to look you over after the magician gets hold of you. Could give you a lot of pointers on how not to strain your stitches."

She was off, leaving Eleanor with a collection of mixed feelings that she could not express. But she had no time to think things over, as the door opened and she was ushered into the doctor's private office.

She had expected to find an old man, but she found a young, good-looking man, whose laughing eyes did not seem those of a doctor. He pointed to a seat which was in a strong light, and then sat down facing her. "Well—what can I do for you, Mrs.—Mrs.——"

"Wakefield. I wrote you from Marysville, Indiana."

"Oh, yes. I sent you a book, I believe, and wrote you a note asking you to come and see me when in

New York. But that was several months ago, I believe."

"Yes, I have had no opportunity to come until now. I——" Eleanor was plainly embarrassed. The doctor laughed.

"Don't be embarrassed. I'm a doctor and a specialist. You want to see me regarding my specialty. Now what do you want me to do for you?"

Eleanor raised her head and looked straight into the doctor's eyes. "Doctor, I want to be young again—I want to be beautiful—I was a beautiful woman, and—and—I can't bear——"

The doctor was all sympathy, and he said:

"I understand, Mrs. Wakefield. You are rebelling in that greatest of all tragedy, Age, a tragedy in which every woman must eventually enact the leading rôle, some reluctantly, some resignedly, some gracefully."

"I cannot resign gracefully, I will not——" said Eleanor with bitterness in her voice.

"No, and that is where the tragedy comes in. You women are still young in spirit, are still waiting for adventure to come around the corner. You still want admiration in men's eyes." He was quiet a moment then said: "Have you a husband, family?"

"Yes, a husband and two daughters."

"Grown?"

"One married. The other soon to be."

"Hum—I suppose sex jealousy has entered in: daughters young and pretty, mother relegated to the background, and she can't forget her own youth. Not

immoral, but dissatisfied with the unselfish, self-sacrificing, quiet love which is the haven of old age. Friend husband too slow, life not as exciting as when she was young and beautiful. I understand you women, Mrs. Wakefield; I deal with women and I see deep down in their nature the slumbering volcano that no one else sees. I understand—you feel that you are being cheated out of something that now will never happen because of this nightmare Age. Well—in a way you are right. If you haven't got it in you to meet it with a laugh, to be satisfied with friendship instead of admiration, well—I can't make your character over—but," and he looked at her keenly, "I can make your face and your figure over. I can't agree that it will bring you happiness; you know there is a man who said 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you,' and a new face isn't going to give you a new viewpoint on life or new thoughts—but it may help. So—are you to be one of my patients?"

Eleanor said: "It is a question of expense, Doctor. What does the operation cost?"

"About a thousand dollars."

Eleanor gasped. "One thousand dollars." She felt sure that Tom would not agree to spending that large amount of money for what he considered a whim. The doctor watched her.

"Isn't youth and beauty worth a thousand dollars, Mrs. Wakefield?"

Eleanor was quiet, thinking. Could he do it? Would

she be beautiful again? Then she remembered the actress.

"I met a Miss Lee in your waiting-room, Doctor. Could you do as well by me as by her? She is lovely."

The doctor laughed. "Mildred Lee? Yes, she is lovely, and she was very far from lovely when I took her. Years in the two a day and later in the movies, added to cocktails and champagne and all that goes with that indulgence, had left its marks on her face. Now you—you have come to me at the right time. 'Sagging cheeks,' " and he went to Eleanor and standing behind her lifted her cheeks, smoothing the lines. "Look in the mirror. See? Those lines can be taken away, your neck made smooth, cheeks lifted, eyes—let me see—yes, not too far gone. Practically all lines taken away." He studied the face at every angle, walked around Eleanor, had her stand up, looked her over with a professional eye.

"Twenty-five pounds too heavy, hair grey, must be changed—what was it before?"

"Light brown; when I was a girl it was a golden brown."

"Yes, make it the same shade—brown with streaks of gold through it. Complexion bad; diet will do that. Yes, Mrs. Wakefield, I can make you a beautiful woman. If you will put yourself into my hands, and obey me implicitly, I mean about diet and exercise, I can make you so that your own husband won't recognize you."

Eleanor flushed, "Oh, Doctor, I—I——"

"When could you come to me?" the doctor asked, knowing that Eleanor would come, even if she had to steal the money. He knew Eleanor's type of woman and knew that, like Faust, they would sell their souls for their lost Youth.

Eleanor studied. Could she get the money? But she *would* get it. The doctor was right in his judgment. She *would* get the money.

"My youngest daughter is getting married. I will come as soon as I can possibly get away after the wedding. About two months from now, I think."

The doctor rose, "Let me know in advance, and don't make it too long. The longer you wait the more work has to be done." He bowed her suavely to the door. "Good-by, Mrs. Wakefield; I will expect you in two months."

CHAPTER VII

THE wedding was all that Beth had hoped. Her dress was a quaint sixteenth century affair, the head-dress and veil were a frame for her beautiful face. The bridesmaids' dresses were also of the sixteenth century and the tiny boy and girl who strewed roses in front of the happy couple looked as if they had stepped out of a picture. A special car from Chicago brought guests, and the world and his wife were at the reception.

Eleanor was a proud and happy mother when she stood on the steps and threw the last handful of rice at the departing couple. She felt that one of her daughters had realized the dreams she had had for them, and she almost forgot the disappointment Peggy had caused her in her hasty, "unfortunate" marriage. At least one of her sons-in-law was not a farmer. The next morning the caterers and gardeners came and took away their debris, and by afternoon no one would have known that the house had been the scene of one of the biggest functions given in the town.

Eleanor was tired and ill for several days after the excitement of the wedding and the reception. That was to be expected. Tom was unhappy. He missed his girls. He especially missed Peggy after her marriage, as her keen wit, her absurd cynicism, always

amused him. He had not exactly understood his clever, erratic daughter, but he knew that her clear common sense could always be relied upon. With Beth, it was different. She was quiet, undemonstrative and by no stretch of the imagination could she be called clever or even amusing. Yet he missed her and the young people she brought to the home. He had to admit that the house was more peaceful. He could read his paper without being interrupted, and once in a while Eleanor could be persuaded to give him his evening game of casino. He felt that now was their Indian summer. They could settle down to enjoy their old age together.

But he counted without taking Eleanor into his calculations. Eleanor found that there were not so many invitations to dances and the things she loved, there being no daughters to be invited to the parties, and she looked forward with fear in her eyes to the many, many evenings she would be compelled to pass with Tom sitting opposite her at the library table, often peacefully snoring, a thing she loathed. This evening nap of Tom's seemed so bourgeois, so intensely middle class. She resented it from the bottom of her heart.

She made Tom go to the movies when she could stand it no longer. Anything rather than sit in that lonely house. She was like many mothers who, when their daughters leave the roof tree, find their lives empty. She had not realized how much she lived in the lives of her daughters, how she shared in their

pleasures and their petty quarrels and sorrows, how much she was interested in the boys who came to see them, and in their parties and friendships with the other young people of the town.

Often when Tom would fall asleep over his paper, she would rise softly and go to her room. She tried to become interested in the new novel, but the heroines were always young and beautiful, and it brought back the old bitterness. She could never be a heroine again, she was not young and beautiful, she was getting old. She would study her face in the mirror, would lift up the cheeks as Dr. Sherman had done, would try to smooth away the wrinkles around the eyes. She had not forgotten that she had made an engagement with the doctor, and the two months were nearly gone. When would she dare approach Tom?

One night after she had played game after game of casino with Tom, she boldly started the subject that was forever uppermost in her thoughts.

"Tom, the girls are both married now. Do you remember what you promised me?"

Tom looked up from the card in his hand. "What did I promise you?" he asked.

"Don't you remember?"

"No; what was it? I always keep my promises, you know."

"Yes, I know that, dear. That is the reason I dare remind you."

"Well, what is it?"

"You promised that when the girls were married, I could go to New York and have that treatment."

"What treatment? You aren't sick, are you?" and he looked up in concern.

"No. Nothing like that. But you promised me that when the girls were married you would let me take that beauty treatment, the face lifting—Fanny Ward thing—you remember the book about her, don't you?"

Tom put down his cards. "Fanny Ward—who's she?" he asked.

"Oh, Tom, have you forgotten already? Fanny Ward, the actress, that had her face treated and who is sixty-two years old and looks like a girl of twenty-five. I showed you the book—don't you remember?"

"Oh, that actress. Yes, I remember something about it. What's that got to do with us?"

"But, Tom. Don't you remember that you promised me I could have it done after the girls were married?"

"Good Lord, Nell, I never thought of it again. You were just talking."

"I wasn't talking, Tom. I meant it, and I thought you meant what you promised."

Tom looked at her. "Eleanor, are you still thinking about that fool thing?"

"It isn't a fool thing, Tom. I saw the doctor when I was in New York and he says that I can be made to look like a girl again. I saw a woman, too, who had been made over, Tom. Really been made over.

She was lovely and she told me herself that she was much older looking than I am."

"Is that what you did in New York, Nell? I thought you went to buy clothes."

"I did buy clothes, but I saw the doctor, too."

"But, Nell, put that out of your mind. We're happy now, comfortable. We can live our own life, and just settle down for the rest of our days and be comfortable."

Eleanor flew into one of her sudden rages.

"We can live your life, you mean! Settle down and be comfortable! Comfortable, who wants to be comfortable? I want to *live*! We're just vegetating now. I can't bear it, I can't bear the thought of passing the rest of our lives like this, playing casino——" and she pushed the cards from the table. "I hate it, I tell you, I hate it!"

Tom looked troubled. He never knew what to say when Eleanor began what he called one of her scenes. He generally found it best to remain quiet, as, whatever he said, it was always the wrong thing. He simply stared at her, thinking that when her little burst of temper was over, she would perhaps cry a little then be again his adored Eleanor. But this time she did not cry; she went on, with a bitterness in her voice that Tom did not understand.

"Tom, how can you be content to settle down into this middle aged stupidity. It is like an animal. Eat and sleep, sleep and eat. I won't do it, I tell you, I won't do it."

"What do you want, Eleanor?" he asked.

"I want to be beautiful again, I want to be young."

"But, Nellie, you can't be young. We are getting old. We can't help it."

"But I don't need to *look* old. I can look young," said Eleanor.

"But, dear heart, listen to me. Why kick against looking old? I don't care. You are always young to me, the most beautiful woman in the world."

"But, Tom—can't you understand? All women hate this thing, this looking old, this not being in things because she is old. Why, age is dreadful! Don't you know that people write to steamships and ask that they are not put at a table with old people? What fun do old women have? They aren't asked to dance—I love to dance. But I'm asked to sit out and play bridge, or sit around with the women. I can't bear it, Tom. You know yourself that I have to make you dance with the wives who are of my age, and then they make their husbands dance with me because you asked them. And I always draw a Methuselah at a dinner table—and—and I don't like old men, Tom. Their necks are stringy or fat and they just *eat*."

Tom laughed. "Well, that's what you go out to dinner for—to eat, isn't it?"

"There you are!" said Eleanor sarcastically. "That's the old man of it. He goes out to dinner to eat. He don't try to make himself amusing. He eats. He can eat at home. Why have some poor hostess feed

him, when he don't pay for his dinner by being amusing to his dinner partner?"

"But aren't you getting off your subject? What's an old man and his dinner got to do with your face being lifted or dropped or whatever it is?"

"Don't you see, Tom? Don't you see?" asked Eleanor eagerly. "If I was like I used to be—don't you remember the attention I got when I was young? I didn't have to sit on the side lines with a lot of old women, I didn't have to draw grandfathers at a table—why—why—I had half a dozen partners for every dance. Oh, Tom, can't you see why I'm nearly crazy!"

"I see you're all crazy, if you ask me," said Tom.

Eleanor's eyes flashed for a moment, then her face settled into the obstinate lines that Tom knew only too well. They said nothing for a few moments, then Tom said sullenly: "Well, what do you want?"

"I want you to let me go to that doctor in New York."

Tom shook his head. "I can't see it, Nellie. For one thing, it would be expensive. I can't afford it. Beth's wedding put me back quite some."

"It isn't very expensive, Tom. I asked the doctor."

"How much?"

"Only a thousand dollars." There was a quaver in Eleanor's voice. She felt that Tom would feel that a thousand dollars was a great deal of money to spend on a whim, as he called it. She was right. Tom pushed

back his chair and, if Tom could glare, he glared at the wife across the table from him.

"A thousand dollars to get your face peeled? You are crazy!"

"It's not peeled, Tom. And a thousand dollars isn't so very much——"

"Not much? What do you think I am made of—money? What do you think the drug business is, a gold mine or an oil well. Think again."

"But, Tom," and there were tears in her voice if not in her eyes, "is a thousand dollars too much to make me happy? You always say you would do anything to make me happy."

Tom looked at Eleanor, a long searching look, that after a time made Eleanor look down at the table. She took up a paper-knife and began playing with it. She could think of nothing to say.

Finally Tom said: "Eleanor, can't you be happy just with me, with our home, with our friends. Why, I thought we were going to have the best time of our life—that we would live quietly this year, perhaps travel a little next year if business is good and these chain stores don't put me out of business. You know you have always wanted to go to Europe. We might go next fall."

"Yes, Tom, that is nice—I'd like to travel. But, Tom, I don't want to be so old that people won't want to sit by me at the table."

"But, Lord, Nellie, you aren't so old as that yet. Wait a few years, then when you begin to look like

old Mrs. Martin you can talk about this fool thing. But you don't need it yet."

"Tom, I can't wait. I'm just at the breaking-point. If I wait until I'm really old, nothing can be done. The doctor says I must not wait."

"Oh, the doctor. He wants his fee. He thinks a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Eleanor sat back in her chair. She said nothing for a few moments, then she said in a low voice:

"Tom, are you going to keep your promise?"

"Oh, Nell, for God's sake, forget it. I could no more raise a thousand dollars just now than I could fly."

"Borrow it, Tom. Your credit is good."

"Borrow it, Nell? To get your face lifted? That'd be a nice thing to ask to borrow the money for, to get my wife's face lifted. I'd hate to spring that on Gus at the bank. He'd think I was crazy, too."

"But you don't need to tell him. Just say you are putting in some new fixtures or something."

"Nell, how can you propose such a thing? I've good credit with the banks. They know if I borrow money it is for some legitimate investment, something that will help my business. I may have to go to them soon, as these chain stores are hurting me. There's a new one opening on the corner opposite me, and they attract a certain class of trade with their penny days and their sales. I may have to put in a new, cheaper line of goods, and I'll have to borrow, as I

haven't been laying by much surplus these last few years. We're rather an expensive family, and——"

"You mean you *won't* borrow, not that you can't."

"Well, of course, I could, but I won't for a silly whim of yours—think of going to Bill Graves at the First National and saying: 'Bill, I want a couple of thousand dollars; my wife wants to get her face lifted.' What do you think he'd say? He'd give me the horse laugh, and say I was crazy."

"I told you, you don't need to tell him what you want it for."

"Yes, but Bill is my friend and he'd want to know. And a bank likes to know why it is lending money. Bill isn't running a philanthropic institution."

"Does all this mean you won't keep your promise to me?"

"Look here, Nellie. Be sensible. Drop it. Who ever heard of a woman, anyway anybody we have ever known, getting her face lifted? It's just newspaper stuff."

"It is not, Tom. Didn't I tell you that I saw a woman in the doctor's office who was beautiful? Tom, it's wonderful. To think of a woman of fifty looking like that Miss Lee. If you had only seen her, Tom——"

"Don't want to see her. Don't want to hear about her. I'll bet her husband wasn't so keen about this business, if he had to put up the money."

"But she makes the living, Tom. She says he don't

do anything. She supports the family, her husband and four children——"

"Are you suggesting that you'll support me when you get a new face? Make a kept man out of me? I suppose I could put you at the soda fountain and have your new face attract customers—happy thought. Nope—we'll peg along in the old way, you with your old face and Bert Hart will jerk the soda."

"Then you won't do it, Tom?"

"No, Nellie; I haven't got a thousand dollars lying around loose now, and I won't borrow it. So forget it." Then, seeing the look on her face, Tom tried to temporize. "Anyway, for this year. Wait a couple of years—then I can do it. You've got plenty of time."

Eleanor rose angrily. "That's the trouble, Tom. I haven't plenty of time. It's now or never with me. And," Eleanor walked over to Tom and stood in front of him, "Tom, I'm going to do this thing. I don't know exactly how, but I'm going to do it." Eleanor walked out of the room.

Tom sat for a time, looking steadfastly at the table in front of him. Then he bent down and began picking up the cards Eleanor had brushed to the floor in her angry gesture. When they were all piled in an orderly heap on the table, he rose slowly, stretched his arms above his head, yawned and said, "Hell!" then went slowly to his room.

CHAPTER VIII

If Tom had seen Eleanor in her room, he would have seen the expletive he used downstairs made visible in a woman's face. Eleanor paced up and down the room —her face was red and ugly, hard lines were around her tightly shut lips, a deep crease was between the drawn eyebrows, her eyes were dark with the bitter thoughts that were surging within her. At times she struck her hands together, at times she flung them from her. "I will!" she kept repeating in a low voice. "I will!" But how! That was the question. How could she get the money? She regretted that she had never saved a little each month out of her ample allowance, so that in times of necessity she could have a bank balance of her own. That was the way Mrs. Fisher obtained her extra spending money. She never allowed the family budget to equal the allowance given her by her husband. The surplus was banked in her own name. As she said, "I tell my friends to always have a little money of their *own*. If you want a trip and friend husband won't allow it, why, tell him to go *to*. You've got the money and you can go if you wish. Or if you have trouble with your husband, how can you get up and leave if you have to ask him for the carfare? Get some money of your own, that is my advice to *all* wives." Then Eleanor had another friend

whose husband did not give her an allowance, but who allowed her to charge anything she wished. The dressmaker and the tradesmen understood that once in a while the husband paid for a dress that was supposed to cost one hundred dollars that only cost fifty, and the residue was returned to the wife. The milliner, the furniture-dealer, all of the tradesmen were abettors in helping Mary Shoreham add to her personal bank balance.

Eleanor had never stooped to those petty stealings. She had not been compelled to do what she considered an undignified thing, if not positively wrong, as Tom had been most generous. But now she regretted that she had not followed the advice of these modern wives, and so made herself independent in small matters of money. She could easily have saved a few hundred out of the wedding bills, but it had never occurred to her but that Tom would yield, if he saw that she had really set her mind upon this operation. He had never gone against her wishes before, no matter how absurd they had seemed to him.

Eleanor passed a restless night, and in the morning she woke nervous and shaky. A double dose of nerve tonic had to be taken, and the rouge added more thickly. She did not go down for breakfast, and would not answer when Tom knocked softly at her door. Her heart was not softened towards him as she heard him tiptoe downstairs, in order that she might not be awakened. The night had not made her feel more kindly. She felt that he was brutal in not getting

her the money. She knew he could borrow. Why should he have such foolish scruples? People borrowed money to take trips, to buy cars, to build houses—why not borrow it to bring happiness to her. She felt that it was the only way she could ever be happy again. She must have this treatment that was to make her young and beautiful or she did not care to live. She had brooded over this subject so long that she was morbid. There seemed to her only one thing in life: youth, beauty, admiration, the success that would come with this youth and beauty. It must be hers.

She dressed slowly. Then an idea came to her. If Tom could borrow money at the bank, why couldn't she borrow? She knew very little of business. But she knew that money was sometimes loaned on a personal note. Why couldn't she give her note?

At the thought the color came into her face. She put on her hat, and, noticing in the glass that with her added color the rouge was a bit too perceptible, she carefully removed part of it, powdered again carefully, skilfully applied the lip-stick, and was ready to try her new venture.

At the bank she asked for Mr. Graves, the president and an old friend. She was taken into his private office. When she was seated facing her friend, she found it hard to tell him what she wanted. He chatted a time with her on the little events of the day—the dance at the country club, Mrs. Graves' visit to Chicago, his daughter's return to school in Philadel-

phia. Then he was quiet and looked at her inquiringly. Eleanor clasped and unclasped her hand-bag; she did not know how to begin her errand.

Finally Mr. Graves said: "It's nice of you to call, Eleanor, but I'm sure you did not come in just to make me a social visit, nice as it is. What can I do for you?"

Eleanor sat forward in her chair and plunged boldly into her subject. "Will, I want you to loan me some money—me, not Tom."

Mr. Graves looked at her rather keenly, then he said: "Been playing bridge with too high stakes?"

"No, it is not that. But I want to do something and Tom won't give me the money."

Mr. Graves laughed. "We are all hard-hearted once in a while. What do you want—a new car—and Tom thinks the old one good enough? My wife wants a Packard and I tell her a Buick is plenty good enough. It gets us where we want to go; that's all I care about a car."

"No—no—it's not a car. It's something else that I can't tell you—but I must have the money."

"How much do you want, Eleanor?"

"I—I——" Then Eleanor stopped to think. How much would she want? The operation would cost a thousand. She would need to remain in New York for at least a month. She surely could live in New York a month for five hundred dollars. Then she remembered that the doctor had spoken of exercises and diets—she might have to go to a sanitarium. That

would be expensive. She would take enough so that she could be certain of not having to send back home for more money. She was going to show Tom that she could do as she pleased. He thought that because of her economic dependence, words that she had heard many times from the lecture platform, he could control her. But she would show him. She smiled at the banker.

"I do not want very much; only eighteen hundred dollars."

Mr. Graves sat back in his chair, and a startled look came over his face. He had thought she would ask for two or three hundred dollars. But eighteen hundred—that was rather a large sum for a woman in his small town to borrow. Eleanor must be in some kind of trouble.

Eleanor waited for his reply. As it did not come as soon as she expected, she said: "Well—Will? Can you give it to me?"

Mr. Graves put his fingertips together and swayed back and forth in his office chair. "Well—Eleanor, isn't that quite a sum to borrow? What will Tom say?"

Eleanor leaned forward eagerly. "But, Will. That is the point. Tom must not know it."

Mr. Graves looked at the nervous woman opposite him. What could she want with eighteen hundred dollars? His wife would never try to borrow such an amount of money without his knowledge. She was one of Eleanor's great friends; what could the wo-

men be doing that one of his wife's set had to have money and could not tell her husband? It gave him an idea: he would quietly question his wife and find out if they were gambling. It could not be a question of clothes only. No woman wanted eighteen hundred dollars to pay for clothes—at least the kind of women that he knew—Eleanor and his wife.

Eleanor watched him anxiously. "Well?" she said.

The banker cleared his throat; it was evidently a difficult proposition that he had to face. He did not want to refuse her and he did not see how he could give her the money. It seemed to be rather underhanded to do such a thing without Tom's knowledge. He temporized.

"You know a bank must have security, Eleanor. Have you security?"

"No, Will, I haven't. But—but—don't you loan money on personal notes without security?"

"Well, yes, when we know the man and what the money is for."

"But you know me?"

"Yes—but I don't know what you want it for."

"And I can't tell you, Will. You must take my word that I *must* have it. I must."

"Well——?"

"I have no security, but—but—Will, I have my jewelry. It must be worth more than eighteen hundred."

Mr. Graves laughed. "This is not a pawn-shop, Eleanor."

"If you won't let me have it, I must go to the pawn-shop then. I *will* have this money."

Mr. Graves put up his hand.

"Eleanor, you must not go to the pawn-shop under any circumstances. The pawn-broker would tell, and it would cause gossip. It would hurt Tom and perhaps hurt his credit if it were known his wife pawned her jewelry."

Eleanor said bitterly: "Oh, you have the banker's mind. You only think of Tom's credit. You don't think of me at all. But if you won't let me have it, I will have to go to the pawn-shop. I am going to have this money, Will."

The banker looked at the set face opposite him, then he said: "For how long do you want it?"

"For six months. I can pay you back in six months."

"Well—I don't know——"

Eleanor leaned towards him. "Please, Will. Do this for me. I want this money, I must have it. Please, Will."

Mr. Graves threw up his hands in mock despair, then laughed: "Well—if you put it that way, Eleanor. It is against rules, but I know you are all right. I'll let you have it on your personal note—although I feel that perhaps I'm doing Tom a dirty trick—— Can't you ask him for this money?"

"I have, and he says I can't have it—he says he hasn't got it now."

The banker pressed a button. "How do you want it?" he asked.

"Why—why—I don't know. I am going to New York, and—and——"

"Oh. You are going to New York? Say, Eleanor," and Mr. Graves leaned back in his chair, "there isn't any trouble between you and Tom, is there?"

Eleanor laughed. "No, not at all. I'm a little sore that he won't let me have this money, but there's no trouble. I'll only be gone about a month."

The banker looked relieved. "I wouldn't want to help you in doing anything to old Tom, you know."

A clerk entered. "I think you had better have a couple or three hundred dollars in money and an order on a bank in New York. Is that all right?"

"Yes," answered Eleanor. "You know best what I should do."

Mr. Graves turned to the clerk. "Make out a letter of credit on the Chase National Bank, New York, for fifteen hundred dollars, and bring me three hundred in fifties and twenties, and bring out a note payable in six months for eighteen hundred."

Eleanor was quiet when the clerk was gone and the banker said nothing. He was wondering what this friend of his wife's was going to do with eighteen hundred dollars in New York. Well, it wasn't his business, but he would not like to see Mary Graves borrow money unknown to him. He had always thought Eleanor Wakefield a sensible wife and mother, perhaps a little flighty and she made up too much to

suit his taste, but that also was not his business. Tom seemed satisfied and that was all that was necessary.

Eleanor signed the note when it came, took the bills and the piece of paper that represented fifteen hundred dollars and put them in her bag. She rose, "Now, Will, don't say anything to Tom or any one about this. Promise me, no matter if Tom asks you, that you won't say anything."

The banker frowned. "I don't like it, Eleanor, but of course I won't say anything."

Eleanor met Tom that night, half frightened, half filled with the bravado of her act of insubordination. She was very gay and talked and laughed, never mentioning the subject of contention. Tom thought that she had seen that it was useless and had given up the idea. He suggested that they go to the movie, and they went to see a German film which was too gloomy for Tom. Beth and her husband were at the theatre and they went to their home for a little improvised supper. Several of Beth's new friends came in—evidently a set that Eleanor and Tom did not know.

Beth was very proud of her house, of her servants, and of the wonderful service she was able to show her friends. Cocktails and Scotch and soda, lobster à la Newburg, tiny sandwiches, cakes and coffee were served by a man who was evidently used to these late parties. Eleanor and Tom left at midnight and the party seemed to be just starting, as several more couples came in as they were leaving.

Tom said as they walked slowly homeward, "I don't like that crowd around Beth, do you?"

"Oh, I think they are all right. They are Fred's friends, and he wouldn't have them if they were not all that they should be."

Tom grumbled to himself, but said nothing more about it. Eleanor went upstairs and before she went into her room, went up to Tom and kissed him. "Good-night, dear. I may be asleep in the morning, don't disturb me. By the way, don't come home for lunch tomorrow, I am out."

"All right," said Tom. "I'm going to be very busy and I'll get a sandwich at the soda fountain. Good-night."

CHAPTER IX

THE next evening Tom did not return home until after six o'clock. He had passed a busy, worried day in the store and had only time to eat a sandwich and drink a glass of malted milk for his lunch. He was tired and hungry when he entered the house. He went into the living-room and did not see Eleanor, then started to go upstairs when Jenny came to him with a letter which she gave him.

"Mrs. Wakefield told me to give you this when you returned."

Tom took the letter and went slowly up to his room. He thought that Eleanor had been detained at some meeting, one of those numerous clubs she attended, or that she had gone to Peggy or to Beth for dinner. He was sorry, as he did not like to eat alone. He went to his dresser and brushed his hair before opening the note. Then he opened it. He read it—then looked up and around the room as if demanding an explanation of the walls. He did not understand it and read it again.

"Dear Tom:

I am going to New York this afternoon. I have found the money for the operation. I am going to

have it—I told you I would. I will be back in a month, or two at the latest. Don't be cross.

Eleanor."

After the second reading Tom sat down heavily in a chair. It seemed as if he could not comprehend what it meant. Eleanor gone to New York. For an operation. What kind of an operation? Oh, yes, he remembered. Something about her face. But he had talked that over with her—and she had seen that he could not afford it. Then at the thought "afford it," he remembered that Eleanor had said the operation would cost a thousand dollars. How could Eleanor get a thousand dollars? Impossible. She must be playing a trick on him. He rose and went downstairs and out to the kitchen to Jenny.

"Jenny, where is Mrs. Wakefield?"

"She said she was going to New York. She sent her trunk out this morning and she left on the 2:15 train."

"But, Jenny, that is impossible. How could she leave without telling me?"

"I don't know, sir. But she left. She said to give you the letter and you would understand."

Tom stood by the kitchen table unconsciously lifting up and putting down the egg-beater. He took it in his hand and examined it as if that examination were the most important thing in his life, although his eyes did not see the egg-beater. He was thinking,

"Eleanor has gone, without telling me. Eleanor has gone away."

He seemed stunned. Finally he put down the egg-beater and went into the dining-room.

"Shall I serve dinner?" asked Jenny.

"Yes, serve it," answered Tom.

He seated himself in his chair at the head of the table, and sat with his head in his hand, his elbow resting on the table. He could not understand it. Evidently Eleanor was in earnest. The whole thing had seemed so ridiculous to him that he had not supposed that she had really meant all that she had said when they had nearly quarreled over the question of the money for the operation and the trip. It was such a silly thing—Eleanor had left him to have her face lifted. But how had she got the money?

Tom ate the good dinner that Jenny served. He might be stunned with the news, but still he was hungry and he ate mechanically, not tasting the food. The dessert was apple pie. Jenny said as she served it:

"Mrs. Wakefield told me to be sure to have apple pie for you, and not to forget the cheese."

So she remembered that his favorite dessert was apple pie and American cheese. She wanted him to enjoy his dinner. Tom did not know whether sorrow or anger was the stronger. He pushed the pie from him and rose angrily. "Trying to jolly me at the last. Her usual tricks. Getting her way and then trying to make up to me. I'll be damned if she can do it this time! She has gone too far."

Tom went into the library, turned on all the lights, lit a cigar, smoked it for a few moments, then threw it into the fireplace. He walked up and down the room, trying to think. How did she get the money? He thought of Peggy. She might have borrowed it from her, yet that seemed impossible, as Peggy did not have a thousand dollars to lend. Beth—yes, that was more likely. Beth could get it from her husband. He went to the telephone. He asked for Mrs. Paige and when he recognized Beth's voice, he said:

"Beth, has your mother borrowed any money from you lately?"

"Why, no, Dad. Mother has never borrowed any money from me."

"Are you sure, Beth? This is important. Don't lie to me."

"What do you mean, Dad? Don't talk that way to me. Why should I lie to you?"

"All right, never mind. I just wanted to know."

"What is the trouble? Anything wrong?"

"No, nothing. Good-night," and he rang off.

Well, he must try Peggy. He rang up the farm. Peg answered the phone.

"Peg," he said, "has your mother borrowed any money from you?"

"No, Dad. There are seven reasons why she hasn't. The first is we haven't any money. The other six don't count. Why?"

"Nothing—but——"

"What is it, Dad?" And Peggy's voice had an anxious tone in it. "What's the trouble, Dad?"

"Nothing—nothing of any account."

But sympathetic, quick Peg had caught the tone of her father's voice and knew something was wrong.

"What is it, Dad? Tell me."

"I can't very well over the phone. I'll see you tomorrow."

"No, I'll come in. Jim's just coming in from the stable; we'll come right in." Tom hung up the receiver. He felt relieved. Peggy was sensible and might find some solution for the problem that was perplexing Tom. How had Eleanor obtained the money, and why had she gone away surreptitiously?

Tom walked up and down the room, then the house seemed to strangle him. The walls oppressed him. He put on his hat and went out of doors. He paced up and down the sidewalk in front of the house, going to the corner, then turning and walking to the next corner, then back again. Up and down he walked, waiting for Peggy to come. Finally they drove up. Tom came to them as they got out of the car.

Peggy said: "Why, Dad, what are you doing here? What's the matter? Is Mother sick?"

"No," said Tom. "Come on in and I'll tell you."

They went into the house and into the brilliantly lighted library.

"Why all the display of electricity, Dad? Giving a party?" laughed Peggy.

Tom did not seem to hear her. "Sit down, Peg, and read that." He handed her Eleanor's note.

Peggy read it, then looked at her father. She received no help from him and she read the note again.

"What's she gone to New York for?"

Tom said shortly, and Peggy saw his lips curl: "To get her face lifted."

Peggy looked at him incredulously. Then she sank back in the big easy-chair.

"For the love of Mike!" she exclaimed.

"Well, what do you think of it?" said Tom.

Peggy passed the note to Jim. "Read that, Jim. Ninny's gone crazy."

Jim read the note and passed it back. "What's it all about?" he asked.

"Mother's gone to New York and Dad says it's to get her face lifted."

"Face lifted? What's that?" asked Jim.

"Oh, some fool idea that Mother got into her head from reading a lot about actresses and Fanny Ward and women getting their faces made over. But I thought she had forgotten all about it. I haven't heard her say anything for months. Why, it was long before my marriage that she was talking about that. You remember, Dad, she brought home that book of Fanny Ward's. She hasn't said anything since, has she?"

"Yes, she got me to promise her that night that she could look into the thing, and I must have said that when you girls were married and I could afford it I would let her do it if she wanted to."

"But that was ages ago. She got over the idea, didn't she?"

"No, she evidently went to see some doctor when she was in New York, because the other night she told me of my promise and wanted me to give her the money."

"Did you do it?"

"No, I told her I couldn't."

"Was it much?" asked Peggy.

"A thousand dollars," answered Tom.

Peggy gasped. "A thousand dollars—for heaven's sake! Didn't you give it to her?"

"No, I tell you as I told her, I didn't have it. She wanted me to borrow it. I told her I wouldn't do it, and she left me mad that night, but she didn't say anything more, and I thought she had forgotten it, or understood that she couldn't do it."

"But, Dad, she must have got the money. And she must have had more than the thousand if the operation cost that. She would have to live."

Tom had not thought of that. "That's so. She would have to have more than one thousand. How in hell did she get it?"

"Perhaps she borrowed of Beth," suggested Peggy.

"No, I called Beth up and she had not borrowed any money from her."

"You didn't say anything to Beth about her going away, did you?" asked Peggy anxiously.

"No—I just asked her if her mother had borrowed any money from her."

Peggy sighed a sigh of relief. "Well, I'm glad. Because we mustn't let any one know about this. Beth would tell Fred and Fred's mother might get wind of it, and you know, Dad, she's not crazy about Mother —sort of rival bosses, you know. Both want to run the show here, and she would talk." They were all quiet for a moment, then Peggy asked:

"What are you going to do, Dad?"

Tom got up and walked around the room. "I don't know," he said. "This thing's knocked me into a cocked hat. I had no idea that she was so determined on the thing. I thought it was just one of her notions that she gets ever so often and that it would pass over like they all do. I presume I'd better go to New York and see her."

Peggy watched him as he walked around the room. She could see that he was frightfully upset. Finally she said:

"Dad, I wouldn't do any such thing. You don't know where she is, for one thing, nor the name of the doctor or anything. You couldn't find her, quite likely, and—well, I'd let her come home when she was good and ready, and I wouldn't chase after her if I were you."

Peggy watched her perplexed father as he paced up and down the room. She saw the trouble in his face and it grieved her, as she was very fond of her father. Peggy and her father had always been very close to each other. She was intolerant of her mother, intolerant of her discontent, of her selfishness, and

above all she was disgusted with her craze to be young, her fear and resentment of age. Peggy, with her abounding youth, could not understand her mother's desire to be young. Mothers should get old, that was part of being a mother. She expected to get old some day, in a far distant future, but she was going to accept it and not do as her mother did. Make up her face and try to look like one of her daughters!

She felt, as she watched her father, that he was her child and that some one had hurt him. She resented it. Peggy's temper, which was always close to the surface, showed itself in the flush that rose to her cheeks, the angry light to her eyes.

"I think it a shame, Dad. I don't think Mother has played the game. I simply can't get her. She's got an idea that she's a misunderstood person. Ever since that fake astrologer in Atlantic City told her that she was 'magnetic,' that she had 'it,' whatever that may mean, she's felt that she was the cat's whiskers."

"Peggy—Peggy——" cautioned Jim.

Peggy said: "I'll be quiet, Jim, but I'll bust. I'm sore at this." She sat down and watched her father, who was moving restlessly around the room. Finally he said:

"Peg, I think I should go to New York. I shouldn't leave your mother there alone. She's never been there without some one——"

"But, Dad, Mother'll be all right, I tell you."

"I don't know—I think I had better go. I can find her——"

"How'll you find her?"

"I don't know, but I will in some way." He went to a closet and brought out a suitcase.

Peggy saw that he was determined, so she said:

"All right, but before you go I'll get you something to eat. I bet you didn't eat any dinner—and I'm hungry myself. You sit down there, or pack your bag—and I'll be back soon. Come on, Jim."

Jim followed her to the kitchen. When the door was closed, Peggy said: "Now, Jim, we've got to stop Dad from going to New York. He'll go crazy there trying to find Ninny, and how can he find her? He can't."

"But how can we stop him if he wants to go?"

"We'll make him miss the train. You go in and look up the time-table for him and get the wrong time, about half an hour later than it really is. Then I'll feed him and—and—what can I do? That won't take an hour——"

Jim laughed. "Why don't you get one of your talking jags—get started on some one of your bugs—you got enough—and get him to smoking and he'll have to listen—when you get started, there's nothing else to do but to listen. Interruptions to you are like flies, only things to be brushed aside. You can talk, Peg."

"Say, you're not so dumb, Jim Osborne. I'll try it. I'll imagine I'm a filibuster Senator, talking for time. He'll not listen, perhaps, but he'll be so flooded with words that he can't swim out from under. Grand idea."

All the time Peg was opening a can of chicken à la King, and made coffee and soon an appetizing tray was ready for Jim to carry to the library.

"Here you are," she said as they entered. "Now we'll move the things off this table, and we'll eat. I can always eat. Then you'll light a cigar——"

"But I mustn't miss that train. I've packed my bag, and——"

"What time is the train?"

"I don't know; sometime around ten-thirty or eleven. There's a time-table in that drawer. I'll look it up," said Tom. He started to find the time-table. Peg took him by the hand.

"No, you sit still and eat this chicken when it's hot. Jim'll look up the train."

Jim found the time-table and after searching for a time said:

"The only night train goes through at 10:45. If you leave here at 10:30 you'll have plenty of time. I'll drive you to the station."

Peggy gave a quick look at Jim, and he nodded to her. Then she sat down opposite her father.

"Do you want something to eat, Jim?"

"No," he answered. "I'll take this chair and smoke a while." He sat down in a comfortable chair and brought out his pipe.

Margaret was quiet for a time, watching her father, then she said:

"Don't the modern mother make us children a lot of trouble? Here we've tried to bring up Mother in

the way she should go, and then when we think we have her all safe and sound and we can lean back and rest, off she goes to have her face lifted, or she studies Yogi, or wants to change her name because it doesn't agree with her aura, or some other fool thing."

Both men laughed and Peg was quiet for a time. Then she said:

"You needn't laugh; it's serious. I had rather work with children any time than with mothers. Do you remember that old definition of a child, 'God's undiscouraged effort to redeem the world.' That's true; God keeps pouring these young people into the world, with their ideals, their beliefs, their trusts, and they want to make the old world into a beautiful thing, until the older people come along and say: 'It isn't true'—'Don't trust them'—'It can't be done,'—until the boy or girl grows as old and cynical as the rest."

Her father pushed back his plate.

"Have you finished? Was it good? Now you sit back in that comfy chair and take a cigar and just 'set.' I'll sit here and take a cigarette and, well, Peggy must talk or she can't sit still."

"You said a mouthful, Peg," laughed Jim.

"True, too true, Jimmie Boy. As you've found out to your joy *and* sorrow; but you married me as is, and you weren't deaf when you courted me. But where was I?"

"You were giving a little homily on children," said Jim with a laugh.

"Was I? Well, I'll continue. It's a wonder that

children are as good as they are. Parents don't try to bring out the decent things at all. They say 'don't.' The only reason they give is that it isn't right or that it isn't done by the best people.

"Then, the way people gossip before children. That's one thing I don't believe in. I remember how you and Mother used to talk over the neighbors before us kids. Mother'd get out an ax about some woman that had not been as cordial to her as Mother thought she should be, and I'd listen and just drink it in. You know children are trusting and happy-believing children until old people come along with their critical spirit and shatter their beliefs in everything and everybody."

Tom put up his hand. "Don't let me interrupt, Peg, but I mustn't miss that train." He took out his watch. "Nine-thirty; I have plenty of time. I suppose I might as well sit and enjoy myself—Peg's started."

He settled back again in the chair and crossed his legs. "Fire ahead, Peg. You were saying that you were ruined. You don't look it. Anyway, you've had a fine education. You owe that to your mother. She insisted that you go to the best school."

"Yes, I have had a fine intellectual education, best that college could give, but I've had no moral training."

Tom looked at her. "What do you mean, Peg? You've been to Sunday School and to church——"

"What good has either one done me? At Sunday School I heard a fool woman who knew nothing of the Bible interpret the stories until even a child has

to became an atheist, if he has an inch of grey matter. And I went to church Sunday morning because it was the thing to do, not that any one wanted to do it, or did it joyfully. Every one in the house made a kick, Father, Mother, both of us kids, but it was the thing to do. We must go to church; 'they' might talk. 'They' has ruled us much more than God."

"Who's 'they,' Peg?" asked Tom.

"The great big boss of this world. It's because of what 'they' will say that makes most of the people go to church, makes them ride in Packards when they can only afford a Buick, makes them give big parties at the hotels or some expensive place when they should take their friends to Childs, if they did the sensible thing. Gee, don't get me started on parties!"

"Nobody's urging you, Peg. You don't need to tax your vocal cords more than necessary. We've all heard you on parties," said Jim.

"Yes, and you'll hear me some more. That's one of the things that's the matter with Mother. She rushes from one thing to another, always changing her clothes, always hurrying—always growling about going, yet, believe me, never missing one. 'They' might think she wasn't invited; 'they' might say she wasn't popular. Then every once in a while she must throw a party. If it's to be a real splurge, she hires a hotel or some swagger restaurant, and she drags on Dad for all he is worth, and she asks them, all the 'theys' to a big tea-dance, or if Dad has the wherewith and can afford the feed, to a dinner or supper-dance. Every-

body comes, or they would be afraid that 'they' would say they were not in the social set. They don't want to come; husbands kick on putting on soup and fish, and wives would rather go to bed with the latest novel, but there they are with bells on. If we are especially free with the long green, we have entertainers, not that we care to entertain our friends, but so that 'they' will say we 'do things very well,' and 'it must have cost a lot of money.' The men wonder how much it cost old Wakefield, and they figure up the cost of the hotel, the orchestra, the things they ate that they didn't like and the drinks that gave them the stomach-ache, try to find out what we paid the professionals, and, take it all in all, they have a better half-hour after the party talking it and us over than they had at the party.

"Mother lies in bed the next day and reads about it in the morning papers and feels that she is some little Queen, and that she has got rid of a lot of social obligations. She don't think of it in terms of pleasure she may have given the invited guests. Dad reads about it and wonders if the bank will think he is pretty flush and call his note, and then swears when he thinks that all of those people will feel it their duty when they throw a party to ask him and Mother, and that means putting on his dress clothes and going to something he hates—just because Mother asked them to something they hated—and you see, it is a vicious circle, Jim, and people haven't got the nerve to get out of it. 'They' rules them. What 'they' would think if 'they' didn't go to parties. What 'they' would say if 'they'

didn't entertain—afraid of being called stingy, or, horror of horrors, they might think there was no money. That must never be."

Peggy stopped for breath. Jim said:

"So endeth first lesson. But you needn't worry. You ain't in society no mo', chile."

"No, thank God. I don't even read the society column to know what 'they' are doing. If I want amusement I go to the theatre or the movies. I pay for it, and if I don't get a good show, something that amuses me, I kick. Can't do it at a private house. Can't go up to your hostess and say: 'Believe me, but I think you threw the rottenest show I've ever spent two dreadful hours at.' You tell her you've had the grandest time in your young life, then you go home and wash your mouth out."

Both of the men laughed, but Peg was in earnest.

"Yes, you can laugh. But there are no 'theys' in our lives. I eat what I like, on the kitchen table or under the trees, on an oilcloth or on my best linen, because we *like* it that way. We don't ask anybody what we should do. Jim and I sit down and talk things over and figure out things for ourselves, how we can be happy our way so long as it don't hurt any one, and then after we've figured it out, we say, 'Go to hell' to any 'they' people."

Jim reached over and patted Peggy's hand. "We are pretty happy, old girl, aren't we?"

"Happy! We're happy in chunks. And Mother could be just as happy. She's got heaps of friends

if she would stop long enough to get acquainted with them. Dad's a driveling idiot when it comes to her, and neither Beth nor I have disgraced her irrevocably, although, according to her, I done my darndest. If Mother'd just forget her looks. I'm so sick of old women trying to look young, making up their faces like a lot of chippies—no, don't shake your head at me, Jim; I'm vulgar when I feel strongly. When I want a word in the English language that expresses what I mean, I use that word; I'll say street women if you wish it, a rose by any other name, etc. Why do women fuss so over getting old, or over looking old? I can see it if they are trying to play up the sex, but if they're not after a man, why care? Just look nice. Any woman who tries to play up her sex after forty-five is a dumbbell and ought to be put away. But she can have friends, men and boys and women and young girls—she don't have to sit in a corner and read the *Christian Advocate*. She don't have to wear black or shades of lavender; she can doll up decently; wear pretty dresses; make up enough to look nice, but not so as to blind you, and she'll get by with every one."

Margaret turned suddenly to her father.

"Dad, where's that Mrs. Fisher? That new woman who came here about six months ago."

Tom shook his head: "I don't know her. Who's she?"

"I just thought. I bet she has been one of the women who has been helping Mother along in her

foolishness. Nothing definite, but just by her allusions. She's crazy on youth, too. I don't blame her so much; she has no husband nor children, and I presume is trying to get a man. She was the one that brought that beauty specialist down from Chicago who gave those talks at the Arlington. That bird had all the women crazy, and she certainly gave them a fine line of talk. She delivered the goods, all right—put one of those discontented, disgruntled sex-hungry women like Mrs. Fisher into a bunch of good women and it's like putting rennet into a pan of sweet milk—turns the whole thing sour."

Jim laughed. "According to you, Peg, there ain't no 'good women.'"

"Sure there are. The world's filled with good women. And good people are the salt of the earth." Here she chuckled. "But it's salt that drives one to drink. One can be good and still not be oppressive. If you're too good, you're a fool. Variety is the spice of life. Woman shouldn't be too useful, or she will be put on the shelf like the medicine bottle. There's a happy medium. Now, marriage——"

Jim interrupted. "Gee—we've got her on marriage. Is it real marriage or trial marriage, Peg, you will hold forth on?"

Peg made a little face at Jim.

"All marriages are trial marriage. Marriage is like eating with chopsticks: it looks easy until you try it. It's a pity that one can't have a husband sent up on approval, like a sewing-machine or the victrola."

"Oh, soft there, Peg. Soft there. Where'd I be if I had been sent up on approval?"

Peg laughed.

"You said it—but I'd send for you back again. You have one great fault, Jim Osborne—when I get good and fighting mad, you don't fight back. You generally stop my flow of language with a kiss, and after two or three I forget what I was mad about. It's taking an unfair advantage of me."

"It's better to have kissed and paid the cost than never to have kissed at all," Jim murmured.

"Oh, shut up, Jim. You're silly." But the look in Peg's eye as she looked at her good-looking husband lounging in the easy-chair, was far from a belligerent one.

Tom started from his chair. "I wonder if I ought to call up Beth——"

Margaret put out her hand and stopped her father.

"Nothing doing, Daddy. Let Beth just find out you and Mother have gone to New York—on a business trip. Now, there's Beth——"

"What's the matter with Beth?" demanded Tom.

"Beth has too much mother-in-law, for one thing. When mothers-in-law come in at the door, love flies out of the window. I read a cute thing the other day and it fits—see if I can remember it. Here it is: 'In the mathematics of matrimony, two plus a baby equals a family; two plus a mother-in-law equals a mob.' I'd can that old lady if I was Beth. And Fred—now, Beth married Fred thinking she'd reform him. Well,

when a boy's strong enough to have made a past for himself, he isn't going to sit down and let some one carve out a future for him. Especially a girl like Beth. To get the best out of marriage requires a genius, a big sense of humor, and a lot of philosophy, and Beth hasn't got any of the three."

"A dark brown past is sometimes an insurance against a black future. Sometimes a man who has seen life is not so likely to be looking for it. Now, look at me, what a model husband I have settled down into." And Jim looked at Peg with a mock seriousness.

"Oh, *you*! Shucks! Do you suppose I'd marry a reformed rake? Not me. He'd be like a made-over dress, or a bottle of ginger ale that had stood open all night—lost his style and his flavor. I want my mummies fresh, as Mark Twain said."

"You analyze life too much, Peg," said Tom. "If you do that you get about as much pleasure out of it as a person dieting does out of his dinner when he counts the calories."

"I don't think I do, Dad. But I'm in this little game of matrimony and I am sort of new to it and everything connected with it interests me. I want to get a lot of pleasure out of it——"

"Why should matrimony interfere with pleasure in this day of electricity, birth control and self-supporting wives? I'm for it," said Jim.

"Well, the greatest proof that matrimony isn't a failure is that widows and widowers are always willing

to give it a try again if they get a chance. Marriage is funny, isn't it? I wonder which is the greatest tragedy—to not be married to a man when you ought to be, or to be married to some man when you oughtn't to be?"

"I bite," said Jim. "Which is it, Peg?" And he sat up in his chair, "Is there some man to whom you ought to be married? I am filled with jealousy——" His mock serious tone made even Tom laugh.

"You jealous? Fiddlesticks! If you got jealous I'd wear a cotton-flannel nightdress and you'd get over it. No—I——"

Just at that moment Margaret was interrupted by the shrill, long whistle of a train. They looked at each other.

Tom jumped to his feet. "What's that? Is that the express? What time is it?" He looked at his watch. "Ten-ten. It can't be the express."

Jim and Margaret both rose.

Tom said: "Give me that time-table. Are you sure you were right, Jim?" He hurriedly turned over the pages of the time-table; then, after studying it a moment, he threw it down on the table.

"Damn!" he exploded. "Can't you read, Jim? That train goes at ten-fifteen, not ten-forty-five. What's the matter with you?"

Jim took the time-table and looked at it carefully, a worried look on his face. Then he said: "You're right, Dad. I did make a mistake, but that one looks

exactly like a four. See what I mean?" And he brought the book over to Tom.

Tom brushed it away. "You make me tired!"

Margaret came to her father and put her hand on his arm and looked up into his face. She genially pushed him back into his chair, and sat on the arm.

"Now, listen to me, Dad. You've missed the train, but if you are still determined you can take one tomorrow, the 2:15, the same one Mother did. You go up to your virtuous little couch and go to sleep. Mother's all right. She'll come home peeled, skinned, vacuumed, a new woman. Let her do it if it makes her happy. How she got the money we don't know, but we know she didn't steal it. She may be foolish, but she isn't criminal. And we won't say anything to any one, even Beth, but that she has gone on a hurried visit to some one who is sick—we've got imagination enough to find a sickly relative—and we'll just sit tight and wait."

"I hate to think of her there all alone in that big city," said Tom.

Margaret's arm stole across her father's shoulder, and she bent her head and kissed him lightly on the forehead. She said:

"Mother's of age, Dad. Nothing will happen to her, and if I don't miss my guess she'll be planted in some private sanitarium where the doctor'll have her under his eye, so no one else can get her money. She'll be so busy getting her face made over and her hips taken off, that she'll not have time to get lost

nor go wrong. So don't you worry. Promise me that you'll go to bed and to *sleep*."

Peggy rose and held his face from her by the ears, and, shaking his head slowly, said: "Promise me, Dad o' Mine,—promise me."

Tom gave the promise, rather sulkily, but it satisfied Margaret. "We'll be over in the morning," she said as she and Jim left.

CHAPTER X

PEGGY was right. Eleanor was placed in a private sanitarium belonging to the doctor. It was a small, exclusive affair, very expensive, but the women who were his patients thought no price too high to pay for youth and beauty.

Eleanor wrote home once a week, but did not give her address, nor did she go into any details regarding the treatment she was receiving. She told them that everything was satisfactory, that she was happy and well. At the end of a month she asked Tom to send her two hundred dollars. She did not explain that the masseuse, the electric treatments and the many extras were much more expensive than she had expected. She could not come home as soon as she had hoped.

One more month went by, and Eleanor did not go home. Tom again sent her money. This time it was a thousand dollars. Eleanor did not explain why she needed the money, simply said she *must* have it. She did not feel it necessary to tell Tom that she had finally decided to have another operation. He would not understand, but she felt that she might as well have everything done that would bring her real youth while she was there. Tom had to borrow the money, and he did not even tell Peggy of the drains that her

mother was making on his bank account. Tom could not afford it at the present time, as the chain drug-stores had established a place across the street from his store, and his business was falling away at a rate that frightened him. He knew also that he should put in new equipment, that his soda fountain was not as up-to-date as the one in the store opposite, and he was losing trade. But, he could not do both. Eleanor must have the money. He could not leave her in New York without money, consequently the store and his business suffered.

At the end of three months, Eleanor was lying on her bed reading when a knock came at the door, and at her, "Come in," the doctor entered with Mildred Long—or Mildred Lee, as she was known in the theatrical world.

Eleanor rose and came towards them. Mildred looked at her, and then she turned to the doctor.

"I thought you said you were going to take me to that Mrs. Wakefield I met in your office."

The doctor smiled. "This is Mrs. Wakefield."

Miss Lee looked at the woman in front of her carefully, then her eyes widened and an expression came over her face that made both the doctor and Eleanor laugh. Eleanor put out her hand. "How do you do, Miss Lee."

Mildred Lee put out her hand slowly, never taking her eyes from Eleanor. "In the language of the poet, I'll be damned!" she said.

"Won't you sit down?" asked Eleanor, pointing

to an easy-chair. Mildred dropped into it. "Yes, I need enclosing arms." She looked up at Eleanor as she stood before her, then at the doctor.

"Well, Doc, take it from me, you've done your darnedest, and it's some doing."

The doctor stood rubbing his hands together with satisfaction, his face showing that he was intensely pleased with the effect produced by his patient. "Yes," he said. "A good case, I consider it."

"A case, a case," and Mildred looked at the beautiful woman before her. "And he calls that a case! Stand back and let me look at you."

"You've done nothing else, Miss Lee."

"Well, I want to go over it in detail. You certainly are an eyeful. Let me begin at the beginning. Hair, golden brown, beautiful bob—who's your barber? Forehead, not a line; eyes, like a young girl's, no wrinkles; cheeks round and smooth as a baby's; neck, like a swan's; complexion like roses and cream; figure. Gee, you must have worked! I know what those lines cost. Turn around. Well, well—I hand it to you. No more will I be the doc's prize beauty."

Eleanor flushed with pleasure. It was worth the weeks of work, the diet where she ate nothing that she liked, the worry she had felt about the money—it was worth it all. The end certainly justified the means in her case.

Mildred studied Eleanor critically, then said: "You'll do, you'll certainly do." The doctor said: "I'll leave you women to talk it over," and left the room. Mil-

dred brought out her cigarettes and proceeded to make herself comfortable. Eleanor sat down facing her. After a few puffs, Mildred said: "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going home."

"What you going to do at home? Got a family?"

"Only my husband; both of my girls are married."

"Why don't you stay a few days and see the town? I bet you haven't been out of the place since the doctor got you."

"Well, I have been kept here pretty close, I'll admit."

"And you're going right home—with that face."

"I don't know anything else to do."

Mildred was quiet for a time.

"Say, come stay with me for a few days. I like to look at you. We'll do the shows—I get passes to everything. I'm not working, for a time. Going to Hollywood in a couple of weeks, but just now I'm loafing. We don't eat when I'm not working, but I guess I can rake up an extra hot dog once in a while. Can you come?"

Eleanor thought for a time before she answered. She had not been to anything since she arrived in New York. She loved the theatre; she would not need to go home for a week longer; the extra few days would mean nothing to Tom and they would mean a great deal to her.

Mildred studied her closely, waiting for Eleanor's answer.

"Do you have to go home right away? Don't you like the shows? I'll give you a good time. I know 'em all and I'll show you a side of New York you've never seen."

"I'd love to stay—I don't suppose it is absolutely necessary that I show up at once. I'm wild about the theatre, and—and—it would be wonderful to go with you who knows the players—but—but——"

"Oh, stop buttin'. Come along. Wouldn't you like to see the sensation your new face makes? That's the best way to find out whether the doctor did a good job—see how people take you. You'll get a great thrill. I did. When people would stare at me and then say, 'My God, it's Mildred Lee!'—well, love's young dream ain't in it with the kick you get. Of course, they won't know you and won't know but your face is your regular one, but—how about it?"

The last argument decided Eleanor. She would have the chance to know whether she was as beautiful in other eyes as she was in her own when she saw herself reflected in the mirror.

"Yes, I'll come," she said.

"Good for you," said Mildred, rising. "I'll go and see if I've any clean sheets. My housekeeping is rather scrappy, but you won't mind that, I'm sure." She left after giving Eleanor directions, and getting Eleanor's promise to come the next morning.

Eleanor was elated, yet a little frightened. She felt she ought to go home, that she had been away three months, but to be able to see New York with

an actress, to go to all the theatres, and what was more important in her eyes to go to the places where beautiful women congregated and learn for herself whether she was also beautiful. The temptation was too great.

The next morning Eleanor took a taxi and went to the address given. She found the actress at home in a very pretty apartment on Riverside Drive. She also found Mr. Long, a handsome, lazy, charming man, who, she learned later, was something of a scientist and an inventor, but impractical.

Mildred was in the midst of packing trunks, surrounded by three girls and a boy who were trying to help and being very much in the way. Mildred pushed the hair out of her eyes, and said: "Oh, hello, you found us. We're in a mess. Here, Jack, take Mrs. Wakefield's bag, see that her trunk is brought up; I'll put her in Jane's room." She led the way to a very disorderly room, threw some clothing from a chair, and said: "Make yourself at home. I'm getting the kids off to school this afternoon. The girls go out to Pelham, and Junior goes to Riverdale. I always do that when I go to Hollywood. Can't trust them with their Dad; they wouldn't get enough to eat. Don't you think I've got a nice lot of kids?"

Eleanor agreed with her. "They certainly are nice children—at least I haven't seen much of them, but they look all right so far."

Mildred laughed. "They're the best ever, and I take good care of them. No matter what any one says

of Mildred Lee, they can't say I neglect my kids. Now get comfortable. We'll have lunch about one; at two the taxis come and Jack'll take the children to school. I can't go, was out yesterday and know everything is all right. We'll go to a show and then I have a date with some people, and I'll take you along."

She left the room, coming back from time to time to get clothing or remove articles from the dresser drawers. At one o'clock they all met at lunch. At two the family were put in two taxis, last instructions were given about clothing, spending money and the many things that evidently accompany children when sent away to school; then Mildred Lee threw herself into a comfortable chair, brought out the cigarettes, told the colored girl to get her a whisky straight, and said:

"Well, that's that. I must rest my face. Every year I get the young ones off to school, and it takes a lot of thinking, which is not my long suit. But I have to plan everything, as when I'm on the coast, I haven't time to wonder if they have everything they need. But I always leave a certain amount of money with the head mistress so if they need red flannels, they won't have to bother me with it. She takes very good care of the girls, and I can trust her absolutely. Jack goes out every week and sees Junior, and about every two weeks to see the girls. We're both crazy about the kids." Mildred smoked a while in silence, then said:

"Well, I must doll up. We'll go see Jane Cowl's new play."

They went to the matinée, which Eleanor enjoyed very much. Mildred gave a running little talk about the different actors, and Eleanor felt she was looking behind the scenes, which is a thing very much enjoyed by all non-professionals.

After the show Mildred said:

"I must go over to Robert's place. Would you like to come? Meet some movie people?"

Eleanor was delighted to go. She had never seen a movie actor or actress in person and, having always been a movie fan, the thought of seeing her heroes and heroines of the silver screen gave her a distinct sensation of pleasure.

They went to the restaurant that was frequented by movie people. Mildred seemed to know every one. They made their way to a table where a man was waiting for Mildred.

"Meet Mr. Gorman, my manager," said Mildred.

The man gave Eleanor a quick, appraising look, and evidently liked what he saw. He was eating a club sandwich and asked them what they would have. As they hesitated, he said:

"Have one of these. They're good."

"Not me," said Mildred. "I must remember my figure. No bread for Mildred, and bacon's fatal."

They finally ordered a lemonade sour. Mr. Gorman gave a wry look. "Poor stuff. Want a stick in it?"

"Nope, had my one drink today. Also fattening.

Believe me, I haven't eaten or drunk a thing I like for so long, I wouldn't know how to act. Some day I'm going on a bat and eat a whole loaf of bread, a bushel of potatoes covered with gravy, and drink myself blind. But I mustn't get an embonpoint, at least until after my next picture. By the way——"

Then they began to talk shop. Eleanor took the opportunity of looking around the room, and what pleased her, she saw that the people were looking at her. They stared at her frankly, and with admiration. Eleanor flushed—Mildred saw the flush and laughed.

"What'd I tell you? I said you'd make a hit. Feels good, doesn't it?"

Eleanor laughed. Mr. Gorman looked at her with interest. He turned to Mildred: "In the pictures? I don't remember seeing Mrs. Wakefield."

"No," answered Mildred. Then she looked at Eleanor and her eyes narrowed. "I never thought of that. Why not? Say, what do you think of her, Jim?"

Mr. Gorman smiled. "Well, if I said all that I think of Mrs. Wakefield——"

Mildred did not smile. "I've got an idea. As I said before, why not?" Then, turning to Eleanor, she said: "How'd you like to try the pictures?"

Eleanor looked at her not understanding what she meant. "The pictures?" she inquired.

"Yes, the pictures. How'd you like to be a movie actress?"

Eleanor's face clearly showed her astonishment. "Why—why—I never thought of such a thing."

"Well, think of it. Say, Jim, do you suppose she'd screen well? Of course her coloring wouldn't count, but her features are good——"

Mr. Gorman looked Eleanor over as if she had been an exhibit in a show. "Stunning—stunning—am sure of it! Have you never been on?" he inquired of Eleanor.

Eleanor shook her head; then she laughed a little apologetically. "I have never seen a movie person in real life until I met Miss Lee. And you're my first manager."

Mildred said: "No, she's green—but say, Jim, I think she'd be a wow."

"Yes, so do I." Then turning his head to look towards the door where a young man had just entered and was making his way down the long line of tables stopping at every one to shake some one's hand or to call out "Hello," he stood up and called: "Say, look who's here! When did you hit town?"

Eleanor looked in the direction and saw Rafaelo Cortez. There he was in life, with that same contagious smile he had on the screen, the shining hair, the clear-cut dark features that had made him the idol of the movie world. He waved his hand to Mr. Gorman and Mildred Lee, and said:

"Looking for you, Jeem. Be with you in a moment."

He stopped again to speak to some one, then moved with the slow grace that Eleanor had seen so often on the screen. Finally he reached their table, shook hands with Mr. Gorman and Mildred, and was introduced to

Eleanor. He took her hand and bowed low to her, then lifted his dark eyes to her face and a look of pleased surprise came into them. He found her beautiful, his caressing eyes told Eleanor. She flushed and looked down in confusion. He picked up a chair and brought it around the table and deliberately placed it beside her. Eleanor could say nothing. Rafaelo placed his arms on the table and stared at Eleanor. Then he turned to Mildred.

"Who ees your friend, Mildred? In the pictures?"

"No," said Mildred. "We were just talking about it, Jim and me. I think she'd be another Constance Talmadge. And she's new, and the dear public likes a new sensation once in a while. I want Jim to spring her."

"Yes, we all know they want something new once in a while. Don't we old ones know that? Every time I see a young fellow with black eyes and a straight nose and seal hair, I wonder if I am looking at my successor? It's coming, I know it, and I'm always wondering when it will strike. "But," and he turned to Eleanor, "haven't you ever tried them?"

Eleanor shook her head. Mildred answered for her. "No, I'm the first movie queen she's ever seen, and I bet you're her favorite hero come to life. So don't scare her to death, Rafaelo. Give us some of your valuable attention and tell us what you're doing here."

"What you eating, Jeem? Club sandwich? Is the bacon good? Here, waiter, get me one, and see the bacon's cooked hard. I hate just a piece of dead peeg.

What you drinking?" He looked over the glasses. "No, not for me—bring me a black coffee strong."

The three began to talk shop, a language absolutely unintelligible to Eleanor. She sat back in her chair, hardly able to realize where she was. She was sitting at a table with a well-known movie actress, a producing manager whose name was familiar to every one in the movie world, and Rafaelo Cortez, the most popular movie actor in America. It was unreal; she felt that it was a dream from which she would awake. As the talk went on, she took the opportunity of studying Rafaelo. He was exactly like his pictures; he moved, gesticulated, smiled, used his hands in the fascinating manner she had seen so many times on the screen. He spoke with a slight accent which added to his charm. It was true, she was really sitting beside him; he had looked at her with admiration; he had talked to her. She felt that for the first time she was really living.

After the sandwich was consumed, another cup of coffee ordered and drunk, they prepared to leave.

"Where you staying, Mrs. Wakefield?" asked Rafaelo.

Mildred spoke for Eleanor. "Oh, she's bunking with me, for a time. Says she's going home next week, but I'm going to get her to think over a proposition I've got under my bonnet. Come up and see us, Rafaelo. The kids are off to school and you can have quiet and repose. Jack's got some new bug—he's inventing something in the kitchen, keeps it all mussed

up so's Florence can't get around. She'll give notice one of these days, if he don't keep his clutter out of her way."

Both of the men laughed. "What is it this time? A new machine for perpetual motion or a vacuum cleaner?"

"I don't know; I never bother. It'll run its course, but it keeps him busy and out of mischief. I hope this one'll last until I get back."

As they were leaving, Rafaelo turned to Eleanor and said: "How about a show tonight? Does that hit you, Mildred? Anything doing, Jeem?"

Mildred said: "De-lighted, Rafaelo. We're ladies of leisure, Eleanor and I."

Mr. Gorman said: "I can't go to a show, but I'll meet you afterwards. How about that new place up on 57th Street—what's the name? Frances something? I'll meet you there."

"I know it," said Mildred. "Rotten prices, they do soak you. But you Rockefellers can stand it. Will you come to the house, Rafaelo, or will we meet you at the theatre?"

"Can't you come to dinner?" inquired Rafaelo.

"No, not for me. I can't look at food and not eat it. I've fixed my dinner—what I should eat, not what I want to. Good for Mrs. Wakefield, too. So we'll meet you at the theatre."

The theatre was named and they separated. Rafaelo insisted on shaking hands with Eleanor and held her hand a little longer than conventionality required.

Mildred laughed: "Don't be such a fast worker. Rafaelo. You'll scare her off."

When they reached home—and Eleanor noticed that a taxi was taken for everything, Mildred did not walk a step if she could help it—she said to Eleanor:

"Well, we'll call it a day. I'm tired. I wonder what friend husband is doing? Ah, I see a light in the kitchen. Come in, let's surprise him."

They went into the kitchen where Mr. Long, his hair disheveled, his face flushed, was stirring something in a saucepan. It gave off a dreadful odor, and Mildred gave a gasp.

"John Gifford Long, what are you cooking? For heaven's sake, open the windows! We'll have the sanitary inspector around. The neighbor'll swear there's been a murder and the corpse is decaying. What in the world is it?"

Mr. Long turned to them and there was a light in his eye. "It's a new combination, Mildred, of——"

"Never mind what it is. You'll blow up the house one of these days. Shut off the gas and come on with me."

Mr. Long reluctantly turned off the gas and followed his wife from the room. Mildred took Eleanor to the room she had prepared for her, looked it over with a housewifely eye, and said:

"I hope you'll be all right. Clean towels in that cupboard in the hall. You'll never have them unless you get them yourself. I hope you won't mind the smell. Jack has some chemistry thing he is interested

in at present. I never know whether I'll find the house here when I return or not. But he is a dear, nothing but a big, grown-up baby, and I let him fool with his inventions and things. They're harmless. They don't cost much. Twice he has decided to go into business and it kept me strapped for a year paying his debts. He is no business man. Once he tried to be my business manager and I nearly landed in jail. So we've decided to let him putter around. But I like him as he is. You know, Eleanor—can I call you Eleanor?—the most lovable men are not always the most practical, what you call efficient, men. Now, Jack isn't worth a darn as far as making a living is concerned, but—but—I wouldn't trade him off for all the clever, cold-blooded, efficient business men in the world. I like him as *is*." As she was leaving she stopped at the door and said: "Put on your best evening dress. I'd like to see you string Rafaelo a bit. He thinks he's some winner, and he certainly eyed you as if you looked good to him. Don't tip off a thing about your age or where you been. Let him think you just blew into town. If he falls for you, you know you're 'It,' because all the women are crazy about him and throw themselves at his head. He can have his pick, take it from me, and he don't fall easy."

Eleanor and Mildred ate by themselves. Mildred explained that Jack ate a "full-grown man's meal," and, as she could not look at it and not nibble, she had him eat by himself.

"I advise you, Eleanor, not to see the food you can't

eat. It drives one crazy to see creamed potatoes and hot biscuit and strawberry shortcake, and then eat lettuce salad, the dressing only lemon juice, two small biscuit made of dog-biscuit flour—at least, that's what they taste like—and a cup of black coffee. But you'll get used to it, and don't slip. It's a darned sight harder to get off the superfluous five pounds than it is to put it on. You'll not like it, but you've signed an article of slavery from now on. Figures like ours aren't kept with even one square meal a day. When I get old and can't work any more, I'm going to weigh three hundred pounds and sit around in a mother hubbard and enjoy myself. Well——" and she rose from the table. "We're fed, but not satisfied. Get into your glad togs, and let me look you over. I want you to make a hit."

CHAPTER XI

ELEANOR lived in a dream world that night. It was as if she had been transported from earth to another planet. They went to the theatre and after the show were taken behind the scenes into the dressing-room of the leading man. It was a popular rendezvous of people interested in the theatre, and men and women whose names were familiar to Eleanor drifted in and out of the dressing-room, where the owner, absolutely at his ease, took off his makeup and his stage clothes and dressed in his street clothes, talking all the time, paying no attention to his audience, who paid no attention to him or thought it unusual to see a man at least partially disrobe before them. Several joined their party for the restaurant.

There Eleanor had the satisfaction of seeing all eyes follow her as she passed along the row of tables to the seats that had been reserved for the party. Rafaelo sat beside her and his eyes devoured her, if eyes can be said to devour. They danced together, and Eleanor felt she had never danced before. This man was the poetry of motion, and they danced as one person. When he started to take Eleanor out on the floor for the third time, Mildred said: "Stop it, Rafaelo. You haven't got the dance privilege yet. Have a heart, give some one else a dance."

Jim Gorman took Eleanor out of his arms and they danced away. Another man cut in after a time, and Eleanor felt again that she was a girl at a party. All were eager to dance with her. It fed the men's vanity to dance with this beautiful woman, to see others stop to watch them, and to have themselves pointed out to the sightseers who had come to this famous restaurant to look at the theatrical people who frequented it. That's one reason a certain class of men like to take actresses and notorious women to public places, like leading a bulldog down the corner—it draws attention to themselves.

It was the first time in her life that Eleanor felt that she was on the inside looking out instead of the outside looking in. She was part of it. She was part of this gay, jolly, laughing world, where the men and women were people whose faces were seen pictured in the Sunday papers and whose names were known from New York to San Francisco.

A pitcher of punch was brought. Mildred said as she tasted it: "I bet Jim Gorman has made this, in the little room upstairs. Good! Champagne punch is a luxury these days. I'll risk a pound. Try it, Eleanor, it's famous."

Eleanor did try it, and whether famous or not, it was delicious, and after the second glass she found that the world was a very beautiful place, that Rafaelo's hand as he stealthily held hers under the table was warm and velvety and electric. She danced more easily and felt the thrill of a young girl at her first

ball when men cut in and she found herself dancing only a few turns with one partner, when another claimed her. This was not having to sit and play bridge with the middle-aged, nor have a dance patronizingly given her by her daughter's young man. She was intoxicated with the joy of it all. Her face was flushed, her eyes bright and she was truly the most beautiful woman in New York that night. Rafaelo told her so as he danced with her. "You are the most beautiful thing in the world," he whispered to her. Jim Gorman, who did not go in for sentiment, said, "You are some winner," which meant as much as the impassioned words of Rafaelo. Eleanor could not be blamed if she lost her head. She had passed her life in a small town, with small-town men, who might have felt far more and far deeper than these men, but they did not know how to say what they felt. Eleanor did not realize that these people were actors, and they were always playing a part whether on the stage or off. Now their part was to admire and make love to this latest addition to their world, and they did it well. She felt she was living for the first time.

Rafaelo took her home. He managed to get Mildred Lee into a taxi with some others, then when they moved over for Eleanor to take her place, he quickly shut the door and gave the man the address.

Eleanor was no more than seated when Rafaelo took her in his arms. "My beautiful sweetheart!" he murmured to her. Eleanor tried to free herself, but it was impossible. And it was different, this mad, passionate

love-making, the kind of thing she had watched on the screen. Rafaelo was as good a lover in private life as when before the public, and he was in earnest in that he felt for the time, at least, that he was truly in love with the woman who at last was passive in his arms. Her head lay on his shoulder and he kissed her hair, pressed her hands to his lips, murmured sweet things to her. It was all beautiful, a page from a book she had never read before.

When they stopped at the apartment house, she asked him if he would come up. He said: "No, I do not want to spoil it by seeing any one else tonight. I want to think only of you." He kissed her as he put her into the elevator, much to the interest of the elevator boy, but it gave Eleanor another little thrill to think that this man who was the public idol was so in love with her that he did not care that it was known.

Mildred called her to the dining-room, where she was mixing something in a glass. She turned around as Eleanor entered.

"Hello! I thought Rafaelo had eloped with you." She chuckled to herself. "He's some fast worker, that little boy. Sit down. Take a glass of this stuff. It'll counteract all that junk we drank tonight. Yes, it's rotten," as Eleanor made a wry face when she tasted the concoction, "but it's the penalty we must pay to be beautiful. I can't afford to look like a boiled owl tomorrow, neither can you. Remember what I told you, you're a slave from now on. There's

only one thing for you to live for, that you don't spoil the doctor's handiwork."

She was quiet for a time, sipping the mixture in the glass, then she said: "How'd you like the party?"

Eleanor said, with a sigh of pleasure: "I thought it wonderful. I've never had such a wonderful time."

"You certainly made a hit. Did Rafaelo give you the sob stuff? He's some lover, I hear."

Eleanor colored and said nothing.

"Well, don't incriminate yourself. You're old enough to take care of yourself, if you don't look it. But just take this from me. Actors are always actors. In private life as well as on the stage. They stage themselves, they get the part of lover, and they play it to a finish. It's real to them at the time. But they're only acting; they can't help themselves. So have your fun, but don't take any of them too seriously."

Mildred waited, evidently hoping that Eleanor would confide in her. But Eleanor was not of the confiding kind, and this new thing was so wonderful, so beautiful, that she herself did not really know her feelings. She went to her room and lay half the night thinking over the evening's events. Rafaelo Cortez, her hero of the silver screen, actually telling her that she was the most beautiful woman in the world, the only woman for him. It did not seem real.

Then she thought of Tom. Tom, with his patient dog-like devotion, which was entirely inarticulate. Even in the days of their courtship Tom had not been an ardent lover, and now he took her for granted, took

it for granted that she knew he loved her. His embraces took the form of the good-by morning kiss, a peck on the side of the face or the forehead or the lips if they were near him. And the returning greeting when he came in at night. The same husbandly kiss—well, that was married life. She supposed it impossible to keep ardent for twenty years. She wanted no more from Tom than she received, but—it did seem wrong that all romance died out when people were married, when they were compelled to live together in the close intimacy of married life. How could one feel romance over the morning breakfast, when husband read the paper and threw wife an occasional remark on the current topics of the day; when he had to catch the morning train, or hurry to his office? People should not live together; they should have separate homes, where they could visit each other and preserve the illusions of life. How could one be sweet-tempered and romantic in the morning when the cook had to be interviewed, when the groceries had to be ordered, when the wash-woman would not come and must be telephoned for, when all the sordid little details of daily life came in and swept away every thought except that of the stupidity and complexity of modern existence? No! Married life was for people without temperament, people without imagination. Love, the love life of the average married couple as she thought over her friends, was lost. They had all settled down into a great friendship, or mutual tolerance, if not an actual dislike. She did not dis-

like Tom, but she felt that she did not love him. She had never loved him. She had not known what love was. This mad thing that had come to her with the lights, the music, the wine, she had had nothing before like it in her life. And this man with his great black eyes, his caressing voice, his arms that seemed to enfold her, it was what she had read about, what she had dreamed. And now it was hers.

It was nearly twelve the next morning when Eleanor awakened at the opening of her bedroom door. Mildred came in followed by the colored maid with a tray.

"Let's have breakfast in here," she said. "I want to talk to you. Put on a kimono and we'll sit here by the window. It's cold; I want the sun."

She drew up a table, swept the things that were on it onto the floor, and sat down. Eleanor, after a time, joined her. Coffee without cream and sugar was not what she liked in the morning, but it was what she must drink. At home she had been accustomed to a good breakfast of fruit, cereal and bacon and eggs. Now she was allowed two slices of a specially prepared bread, and one glass of orange-juice. Finally Mildred produced her cigarettes and leaned back in her chair.

"I've been talking with Gorman over the phone. He has evidently seen Rafaelo, and they want you to go out to the studio this afternoon and have some tests."

Eleanor looked at her inquiringly. "Tests, what's that?" she asked.

"Oh, tryouts, to see if you picture well. Sometimes one may be as beautiful as Venus and not picture well at all."

"But—but—what are they for?" asked Eleanor.

"Why, for the pictures, of course. Aren't you going to try them? I thought by what Gorman said that it was all settled."

"Why—why—I hadn't thought of it again. I couldn't possibly go into the movies. I must go home."

Mildred smoked quietly for a time.

"Well, of course, I don't know what you must do and what you must not. But you've got a wonderful chance. It don't come to every one. It's hard to break into the pictures. It isn't every one that could get Rafaelo to take an interest in her, or to get Jim Gorman to even say he would give you a test. Unless you just have to go home, family and all that, I think you're a fool not to try it. You haven't any children that you ought to take care of, have you?"

"No—my girls are both married and don't especially need me, but—but——"

"Friend husband, I suppose. Would he object?"

"I—I—don't know. I think he would."

"Well, that's your lookout. But it seems such a chance to me. Of course, the pictures are my world. I can't see anything else. I don't know any one except they are in the theatre or the pictures or both."

"I've—I've never thought of them at all except—except——"

"Outside looking in. Well, you've got a chance to

be inside looking out. Didn't you ever know any theatrical people before?"

"Never. You're the first person I ever knew who was on the stage."

"Didn't you like those you met?"

"Very much, but—but—they are different from people I know. They——"

"I know what you mean. They live in a different world. That's true. But still they're human. People who don't know them think that all stage people are eaten up with conceit. They are. But if they didn't believe in themselves, didn't believe that they are the whole cheese, they would never be where they are. Most of them have spent years sitting in managers' and agents' front offices, insulted even by the office boy, waiting for a job. And if they didn't have the nerve and the brass of a statue, and that absolute belief in themselves, they would get discouraged and quit the game. Remember all the stars you saw didn't begin by being stars. No, indeed, they put in most of their lives climbing mighty long and hard stairs, and often when they got up one step some one kicked them back two. But an actor more than any one else has got that never-say-die to him that makes him succeed. They're a conceited bunch, we must admit. They like to hear the sound of their own voices, and you've never seen one yet that didn't tell you he was the hit of the show, that it was his work that put it over, even if he only said: 'My lord, the carriage waits.'"

"I don't know anything about them—they did seem to talk a lot of shop that I didn't understand."

"Yes, they talk shop. But that's all most of them know—their world, the theatrical world. And they only mix with people in the same business, so they don't get what you might call a general education. They don't read a lot except theatrical news and things like *The New Yorker,* so they aren't interested in politics, religion or the news in general. Remember, that doesn't include all stage people. Some of them are college men, some of them are up on the times just as much as a business man, and some of them read the same kind of books as a college professor. But they are the exceptions. The average, garden variety of theatre man or woman doesn't know, nor care about, anything outside. It's more important to them whether Lottie Lightfoot got booked on big time, than whether the Germans are going to pay their debt, and they don't care whether the Spanish licked or got licked in Africa, or who is going to run for President except that they hope it means good times and people go to the shows with their superfluous kale. But that's neither here nor there. Will you go this afternoon and have a test?"

Eleanor was silent. She played with her spoon, she folded and unfolded the napkin. Then she threw the napkin on the table.

"Mildred, I can't decide. I ought not to do it. I really should go home."

"Just why should you go home just now? Isn't

your husband all right? You've been away three months, would three or four more months hurt him? Suppose you had gone to Europe or around the world for a trip, it would take as much time, and you wouldn't feel as if you had to hurry home from a trip because Jimmie—what's your husband's name?"

"Tom."

"Because Tom was pining for you. Is some one taking care of him?"

"Yes, he has the maid who has been with us for years. So far as that is concerned, he is as well off as when I am home, but——"

"Afraid to leave him alone—afraid some doll'll cop him out?"

Eleanor said quickly: "No, not that; Tom's not that kind."

"How old is he?" asked Mildred.

"Fifty-two," said Eleanor.

"Dangerous age," answered Mildred, dryly. "Bad age, fifty to sixty. Has he a woman secretary?"

"No, he has a drugstore and no women in his employ."

"That's one to the good. I'm suspicious of women secretaries. If I had a husband and he'd employ a woman secretary, I'd take the next office and keep the door open. They got the grand chance to get a man. They make life comfortable for him, they take the details of life off him, and they see him when he's at his best, when he ain't all tired out with the day's work. Most men love their work and their office. He

sees this competent woman around him, helping him do the things he is interested in, and if she's got the brain of a house-fly, she's got the inside track on the wife. He sees her when he goes home at night and is tired, and he has to hear of her daily doings in which he isn't interested, and she makes him do a lot of things, like going out to parties and the theatre when he'd rather stay at home, and he has the worries of the household brought to him and they all seem so petty and little—that he sort of compares her to the secretary, who is always helping him straighten out his engagements and taking his worries on her own shoulders, if it can be done—and I'd not worry whether my man kept the ten commandments and went to church half as much as whether he kept a pretty secretary and came home to dinner, so—well, no secretary in mine."

Eleanor was quiet for a moment, then she said:

"Tom's too old and too quiet and settled down to think of women."

Mildred laughed. "Now, don't get that idea. As I said, from fifty to sixty is the dangerous age for men, and from forty to fifty for women. Women see themselves fading and settling down into a sort of family life that gets on their nerves. That is, if they aren't the purely domestic type, and have children and grandchildren coming that can bring out the maternal again in them. You see, at forty the children are grown up or away to school, and the woman does not have so much to do and time hangs heavily on her

hands. And she goes into society, if she has a chance, and passes the time playing bridge with a lot of other middle-aged women who are facing the same problems, and they haven't any real interest or work in life; so they get discontented and scared that the years and the wrinkles are coming, so—well, a lot of them, if they aren't awfully well balanced, they make fools of themselves."

"That's women; we were talking of men. I thought men didn't have dangerous ages."

"Take it from me, they pass through a damned dangerous age. And they generally play the devil much more than women. They have so many more temptations because they go hunting them up. They have the bigger chances and don't take such risks as a woman. Even if they're caught they aren't ruined, while as for a woman—— Good-night, if she gets caught trying to scrouge a little romance into her life before it is too late. When Daddy gets along between fifty and sixty, quite likely he has made his little pile, and the children are off his hands and the office work don't push him; he can hire more competent men to run it, and he looks around and wants to play. He don't feel his age and quite likely he don't look it. He hasn't played much and he is a little awkward how to go about it. But there's always some young and beauteous maiden to show him the ropes, because Daddy may have but one leg and store teeth, and a glass eye, but if he has a nice little pile soaked away, and Dolly knows it, he'll be told that he is the gay young Lochin-

var just come out of the West. And Papa believes it. Now, that's the difference between men and women. Mother may be told that Johnnie likes 'em settled and serious, but she don't really believe it; and after she's paid the dinner check for Johnnie a few times she gets wise—that is, most of 'em do. But Father swallows the fish, bait, line and sinker, and he begins to cavort around. He don't intend to do anything wrong, just play a little; but one thing brings up another, as the man said when he rushed to the rail on the steamship, and soon Poppa is floundering around on the end of the line, with Dolly's hook nice and fixed in his panting gills. Mother kicks. He tells her she also has her freedom. She can do the same. But Mother can't. She is quite likely fat and fifty, and she don't want to bum around to night clubs and restaurants. She wants to stay at home, but she don't want to stay at home alone. She wants Father to mix with his old-time friends, but Father wants the white lights. So there is a bust-up."

Eleanor said indignantly: "There should be. I wouldn't stand for it at all. No wife should."

Mildred put up her hand. "Soft pedal there, soft pedal. Sure she should. Father'll see the light. He'll come home, maybe a little bit damaged, and his pocketbook'll have a crimp in it, but he'll come home. He likes Mother, he adores his family, he loves his home. If it comes to a showdown between the lights and Dolly and Mother, why—they won't be able to see

him for the dust as he heads straight for the family fireside."

"But it would be humiliating for a woman to take a man back after he had been untrue to her. It would hurt her pride. She should not do it."

"Rot! What's pride got to do with happiness? She should take into account all the years she and Father have lived together and he has been good to her and they have made the home together and brought up the children and saved and worked and fought and loved, and she shouldn't let a few months or even a few years of Father's wanderings wreck all the wonderful times they have had together in working for a common end."

Eleanor shook her head. "I can't see it, Mildred. I think a man and his wife should be faithful to each other."

Mildred did not know that Eleanor was feeling remorseful over the fact that she had allowed Rafaelo to kiss her. With the morning light, things looked different, and Eleanor had been trained in a school that believes that a married woman should not allow the caresses of a man not her husband. Eleanor was foolish, vain, silly, wanted admiration for itself, not for the means to be unfaithful to her husband. And this morning she was feeling very downhearted, very depressed. She had almost committed the unpardonable sin, and she was feeling very unhappy over it, which of course made her hard in regard to that sin. This morning was not the morning Mildred should

have taken to preach her little homily on marital laxity.

"Faithful—fiddlesticks! Now, there's one thing I don't believe in divorce for, that's infidelity. There's so many worse things than infidelity. I'd divorce a man if he was mean, if he treated me in a rotten way, I mean by being mean about money, that is, giving me what he could afford to live the way he wanted us to live; if he was sarcastic and picked on me, or if he neglected me, just natural cussedness some men show their wives and no one else—then I'd let out a yell you could hear to the Battery and march him into some divorce court—but that he lost his head over some pretty skirt for a time—well, I'd bind up the bruises and wipe his tears away and take him back. I knew he was human when I married him, and because he had the exceptional honor of being tied to me, wouldn't make him any the less human. All men'll fall sometime if they get a chance, so'll women if the right man in the right place at the right time comes around. One reason women don't so often as men, the combination of three-in-one doesn't happen so often in their case as in the man's. We're all human, sister, all human, thank God."

Eleanor laughed with Mildred as Mildred rose.

"Well, so endeth the sermon. Come along; get dolled up and go and give it a try. It don't bind you to anything. And you may be a flop; then that'll settle it. Because Gorman won't give you a look-in,

even for Rafaelo, unless he sees that you'll do. He's not in this game for his health, and he's the cold-blooded fish when it comes to business. They'll be here at one-thirty—make yourself pretty."

And Mildred left the room.

CHAPTER XII

ELEANOR saw the inside of a movie studio for the first time. She saw the people at work, met the leading lady and several of the actors, heard more movie shop talk, and then was taken to a dressing-room to be made up.

Her picture was taken from every angle, and then Rafaelo said: "Let's have a real scene. Stage us a love scene, Jim. Let's see how we would go together."

One of the stage sets that was vacant was taken, and Eleanor and Rafaelo went through a scene.

Finally, when it was done to the satisfaction of Mr. Gorman, they left. Mr. Gorman said: "We'll come out tomorrow to see it—haven't time to wait now."

Rafaelo, Mildred and Eleanor dropped Mr. Gorman at the subway, then they went for a drive into the country. They stopped at an inn for tea, and as usual Rafaelo made a sensation. The tables were filled with groups of people, and they recognized Rafaelo instantly and all eyes were turned on him. Eleanor could see that he liked the attention he aroused, but he was a good actor and appeared as if he did not notice it at all. When they were through their tea and preparing to leave, a pretty girl rose from her table and came to them. She was flushed and em-

barrassed, but had a determined look in her eye. The girls at the table she left watched her in silence. She came to Rafaelo and said: "Mr. Cortez—I—I—I hardly know how to ask you, but, but—well——" and she started to get something in her handbag.

Rafaelo rose and laughed. "I know—you want me to sign a photograph. I'll be delighted."

The girl flushed again and said: "Yes, how did you know? I bought one this morning—and—and—if you would sign it—well, it would be the greatest thing in my life. I just love your pictures, Mr. Cortez, and go to every one of them. I've seen some three and four times."

"You are a good movie fan, and I appreciate it immensely. Give me the picture."

She gave him the picture and Rafaelo, taking his fountain-pen, sat down and started to sign it, then he looked up at the pretty face above him and said: "What is your name?" She said: "Florence Grant." Rafaelo wrote in foreign hand: "To Florence, my new friend," and signed his name. The girl looked at it; then, looking over at the girls at the table, she said: "Oh, won't they be jealous! They said I had my nerve, and that perhaps you wouldn't do it."

Rafaelo smiled up at her, and his eyes had that caressing look Eleanor had seen in them when he first looked at her. "Why shouldn't I? I like to make new friends—especially as pretty a girl as you." He rose and held her hand a little longer than was necessary, then bent and kissed it. The young girl was

delighted but embarrassed, as it was perhaps the first time she had had her hand kissed. She reluctantly started back to her table, forgetting to say good-by to the women who were watching the scene with amusement. Eleanor watched her as she showed the picture, and saw the pretty heads bent over the photograph. It made her realize the idol worship of the young girl for the popular movie actor.

When they were in the taxi, Eleanor said: "It was nice of you, Rafaelo, to please that girl. She will never forget you."

"No, she'll pay her good money and take all her friends to see everything I do now. It's part of the business."

Mildred was silent for a time, evidently thinking. Then she said: "I wonder if my Betty and Jane will be such fools when they grow up? I presume so. Weren't they a nice-looking lot of girls? From some school, having a little outing, and seeing you certainly made it the end of a perfect day. You know, there's a lot of kicking about the younger generation, as it is called. I think it all bunk. The younger generation are just as nice as girls were in my day, but they are different. They've got the bug of self-expression, the same as their mothers, and they express themselves sometimes in a way that'd make my mother's hair curl. But they are all right. I'd trust any girl and any boy together if they didn't drink. I don't believe in the hip flask. I know what it does to me to take a few drinks too many; I just lose all sense of judg-

ment; and so I can imagine what it'd do to a young girl or boy. But if they leave the booze alone, they're all right. A boy just naturally respects a girl, it's born in him. I'd let my girl trot around with a boy anywhere if they didn't drink. It's the older man that I'd watch. If an older man takes my daughter anywhere, he takes Mother along, believe me. They've gotten past the age of idealism, they're cynical and blasé and they aren't going around with a flapper for their health. No, boys and girls together are all right. As I said before, and as I say again, if there isn't a hip flask around."

Rafaelo said: "The hip flask is one of the things prohibition has brought. Darned rotten thing, that prohibition. Mighty lot of good it has done!"

"Now, don't knock prohibition, Rafaelo. It's done a lot of good in a lot of ways. But it's new yet, and every one thinks it's smart to get around it. These boys who carry a hip flask think they are being men, that they are showing that they are sports by having the drink, but it's going out. I don't think that by the time my girls are ready for the world, drink will be such a subject of conversation as it is now, or that they will think it the sign of a woman of the world to go out with a boy with a flask. Nice girls are going to give the boy the go-by who flourishes a flask. It's coming—I can see it. You know yourself that even in our crowd drink isn't just the thing it used to be. We have a few cocktails once in a while, but we don't swim in them like we used to. If

you go out to dinner, you get a cocktail and a dividend, which is mainly ice-water, when we used to serve them in a punch-bowl. And as for champagne, why, most people don't know the taste of it. It's only movie actors and the new-rich who serve it. It's too dear, for one thing, and then it isn't expected—so why step on your pocketbook for something people don't expect? I like a drink, but don't dare to indulge too heavily, because of my figure. By the time I don't care anything about my figure, it'll be too late. Drink won't be fashionable—so I won't be able to die in the gutter, as I might after all these years of looking and wanting and not taking, if I had a chance."

"I don't drink much, can't afford it. But I feel if I wanted a drink why shouldn't I take one," asked Rafaelo.

"You should and you do—if you've got the price. But you don't take as many as you would if you could get it at a decent price or drop in any place and have a highball. Now I see the difference. In the old days if I met a friend, we went into the Astor or some place and had a gin rickey or some such thing. Now we go to Huyler's or Paige's and have a Sundae if we're not dieting. And it makes a lot of difference in the business man. The other day Charley Mason asked me to lunch at the Lafayette. I hadn't seen him for a long time, he's in some kind of business in South America. He used to be an awful tank, and looked it. I hardly knew him when he met me. We went by his club and he went to his locker and brought

a bottle with some cocktails in it, which we had before lunch at the restaurant. They'll furnish you ice. He took two, and I had two, and it was finished. I said to him: 'Charley, what's prohibition done for you?' He laughed and said: 'Made me minus about ten drinks a day. Now if I have a cocktail before lunch, I have to go by my club to get it, and most of the time it's inconvenient; I can't spare the time. I lunch downtown with business men and we don't think of a drink. Then, I like to know my liquor. I won't stop in any joint and get a drink; I'm afraid of the stuff. No, I'm the model man. Marion hasn't seen me soused but a couple of times since I came back, and, believe me, she's an ardent prohibitionist. She's perfectly willing to have me stay in New York and not go back to the Argentine.' I tell you, Rafaelo, drink is going out. You don't see as much of it as you did three years ago, unless people are trying to show they have money. It's expensive and, of course, some people like to show they can serve champagne at twenty the bottle, and unlimited cocktails and a glass of brandy or some liqueur. It puts them in the rich class, and that's their standard, they like it. 'Verily they hath their reward,' as the Good Book says, among their own kind. And if they haven't got brains enough to amuse you or interest you without a lot of booze, well, let 'em to it. They're the kind that'll keep the bootleggers pussy-footing around for a few years yet, but there ain't enough of them in our hundred and ten

million that'll make a great difference in the long run."

"Your argument may be all right, but I think the sentiment is against prohibition."

"Yes, among a certain kind of people. But you take the working-class, the women. Ask them what they think of prohibition, what it's done for their men and what it's done for them and their kids. They wouldn't vote to get liquor back again. I got a friend that's married to a cop down on the docks, and he's been there thirty years and he knows about the long-shoremen. They don't stop in the saloon at night and spend twenty-five or fifty cents a day—no, they come home and take the family out to the movies and they all have a good time. I stopped off with a friend of mine out in Iowa. She used to be on the Western circuit with me and she fell for a big soft-coal miner in Iowa, and married him and has a lot of kids. I knew John used to tank up and they had a lot of trouble. I asked her about prohibition. What it'd done for her. She said: 'Believe me, it's all to the good. This bum little town had five saloons, and John used to stop in every night and spend a lot of money, and half the time come home half-soused. Now he goes along for about a month, then some of them go to Fort Dodge and get a quart or two and he gets pickled. I put him to bed and get him over it, and he is all right for another month or six weeks. But it isn't the regular thing with him. And we've paid for our house and got money in the bank, and we're

planning to send Billy to a medical school when he finishes here. I can plan things ahead, knowing what John makes and what we normally spend, which I couldn't do before.'" Mildred was quiet for a time, then she continued:

"I was born on a farm, although I don't look it now, and I go back and see the folks once in a while. The people round us are sort of poor whites, hill people, and they go to town only about once a week in the summer and once a month in the winter. Well, when they went to town the man used to get pickled. The wife had to go with him to drive the team back. Then he got a bottle of Green Mountain for a dollar, and he used to bring home two or three bottles with him and keep soused until it was gone. Now he goes to town and where they had nine saloons in the little town, there's only a couple of blind pigs and no horny-handed son of toil likes to pony up fifty cents for a drink of rot gut, so he comes home sober."

"Yes, but he makes a lot of home brew, grape wine and such things. It's worse."

"You don't know what you're talking about. Yes, he makes some grape wine and apple cider, and Mother makes dandelion wine, but they don't make enough to last long. And they don't get drunk on it. When you go to see them, Mother offers you a little glass of dandelion or elderberry wine and a piece of cake, and if there's any left, Father goes down cellar and pulls you a glass of cider that's hard enough and sour enough to give you acid stomach and a headache for

a week. I used to know a man that lived near us, that never went to town but he came home soused, and the team'd run away with him if Mother wasn't along, and he lost three good horses, one after another, by letting them hurt themselves in a runaway. I remember I was visiting them once, just after prohibition, and the woman was sick. She was sitting in a rocking-chair talking with me, when the little girl came in. She said: 'Ma, Pa's home,' then she leaned over and whispered to her mother, but I heard it. 'He ain't drunk.' I'll never forget that woman's face. She couldn't believe it, then after trying to figure it over in her head, she painfully rose from her chair and went and looked out of the window to where the man was unhitching the team to see if it could really be true. That same little woman had all the spunk crushed out of her, but when after a time she learned that her man was getting liquor at a blind pig in town, she went to the owner and told him that if her husband ever came home from that town again with drink inside or outside him, she would report him to the Federal officers. And after that, Father was sober for keeps. No, sir, Rafaelo, you people who yell so about prohibition don't know what you are talking about. You see a lot of drink among your own kind, and the rich get it and keep it because it shows they are rich, whether they like it or not, but the average decent working man knows his little bank balance *is* because he isn't spending fifty cents here and a dollar there treating his friends. And Mother hasn't

to worry about the kids' shoes and buys a parlor lamp or a new rug once in a while. I like a drink myself, but I've had to cut it out, not because of prohibition, but because of my figure and my looks, and I don't see as I'm any the worse for it. So I've figured it out, under my hennaed bob, that if I can pass it by, and I used to lap it up, any one else can do the same."

"But look what it costs the Government and what graft it makes——"

"Oh, Rafaelo, that's the old story. Graft—well, suppose there is. It's new, I tell you. Look ahead, twenty-five or fifty years. The good old United States is going to live some time. Think of the future, when it ain't fashionable, when it's too darned expensive. Suppose it does cost the Government a few millions for a few years; they'd spend the money some way. I never knew governments to hoard their money. And ask the men who employ a lot of working men why they're willing to pay the extra taxes. Bill and Jim can do a good day's work Monday, and they know Sam'll show up for work because he hasn't been out on a bust. You're a past number, Rafaelo, talking against prohibition, or you show the kind of people you know."

"Well, anyway I don't believe in it. But here we are. What you going to do tonight? Say, by the way, Molly Mills is giving a party down at her place somewhere around Tenth Street. Do you want to go?"

"What time is it?"

"Oh, around ten or eleven. Most of 'em come in after the shows."

"That's too late for me. If I don't go to a show, I like to go to bed at nine and rest my stitches."

Mildred looked at Eleanor and saw a disappointed look on her face.

"Oh, you'd like to go, wouldn't you? Well, it's an old story to me, these midnight parties that last till morning. But I suppose it'd be like going to the circus for you, and I promised to amuse you, so we'll go. *If* I can keep awake."

"Why don't you go to a show?"

"No, not tonight. I'll muss around with Jack for the evening. Let him explain all those bad smells to me. He loves to do it, and Eleanor can sleep. Perhaps it's the last time she'll get a chance with me, because I've got a lot of good-by parties on, and she'll need sleep when they're over."

Rafaelo left them at their door, saying he would call for them at eleven o'clock. Mildred said as they went up the elevator: "I'll get you up at ten-thirty and we'll fill up with near food, so we'll not be tempted. If I'm hungry and see chicken à la King or lobster Newburg, and a lot of icecream and cakes, I just can't resist. So I eat a few dog-biscuits and drink some Pluto water or some other exhilarating beverage, then I can say: 'No, thank you,' with a smile."

CHAPTER XIII

THAT night was one never to be forgotten by Eleanor. The hostess was a retired actress who had a beautiful home on Tenth Street. The top floor had been made into one big studio, and with its shaded lights, the furnishings that had been brought from Spain, Italy and France, made a setting for the beautiful men and women who were the guests. They were nearly all of the theatrical or movie world, with a few writers or playwrights and producers. It thrilled Eleanor to see the faces of the people of whom she had read in the Sunday papers for many years. As she watched their gay informality, their seemingly real friendships for one another, she thought of the parties in her home town, where there was always a certain amount of formality and stiffness. Her friends did not seem to know how to unbend, how to play.

She thought of what she had been told once, that the easiest people in the world to entertain are the ones the most used to society. They are at their ease, are not self-conscious. She remembered when she was visiting a friend in the country district of Pennsylvania, the friend decided that she would give a party for the farmers and the people of the village. They came. They were stiff and formal. The men sat on one side of the room and the women on the other.

They could not be moved. They did not talk, except an occasional remark to the nearest neighbor. The men had practically to be forced to dance, although the dances were the old-fashioned quadrilles and barn dances to which they were accustomed. Even the younger people entered into the gaiety only half-heartedly, but the older people had to be asked and persuaded to join the merrymaking. After the party the poor hostess threw herself into a chair, and said: "Never again. I had rather entertain the Prince of Wales than those people."

Eleanor felt she was seeing Bohemia, a word that is anathema to those who are supposed to live in Bohemia. She expected to be startled, perhaps shocked. She thought that all connected with the theatre were different from ordinary human beings, that they took their pleasures differently. She looked for drink, she saw only a bowl of not overly strong punch. It was not patronized any more than is the punch-bowl in the most fastidious circle. But there was an air of camaraderie among the guests. There was much laughter and gay salutations as the later guests arrived. The entertainment was not arranged beforehand evidently, as it was absolutely impromptu. A woman came in who was singing at the Palace; she sang her latest song. A famous dancer arrived; she draped a shawl around her hips and danced a Spanish dance, one of the men joining her at the end. One of the stars on Broadway gave a funny monologue which convulsed his audience. Eleanor was interested in

their appreciation, their hearty applause. The applause and "bravos" were not mechanical, as the audience were actors themselves and watched the performances with the eyes of professionals, who understood good work. After an act they called to the actors, telling them it was good, talking with them about their act. It was like a big family, all glad to help amuse one another, enjoying the giving of their best and appreciating the best in the others.

It was two o'clock when the party broke up, and Eleanor felt she had never passed such a happy evening. It was only one of many. Mildred Lee was loved by the men and women of her profession and all wanted her to come to their homes before she went to the Coast. They would go to a show, then to some hotel or apartment, where there was a crowd of friends who were not working, and would be joined later by the actors and actresses who were playing. They were a jolly, happy-go-lucky lot of people who, if they had troubles, were very successful in keeping them hidden from their friends.

Eleanor saw the tests that had been made with Mr. Gorman. He was very pleased with them, and said she was made for the movies. She would not decide. She could not. She felt that she should go home, and as Mildred was soon to leave, she began to pack for her homeward trip. One night when they came in from a movie house where Rafaelo was in a picture, Mildred said:

"I'm coming into your room. I want to talk to

you. Let me get on a kimono." After a time she came in with a jar of cold cream in her hand, and sat down in a big, lounging chair and began to remove the makeup from her face. She watched Eleanor, who was moving restlessly around the room, picking up an article and laying it down again, going to the dressing-table and fingering the things upon it, then said: "Sit down; you make me nervous. What you fussing around for?"

"Oh, I don't know; I'm nervous, I guess."

"Too much night life, I'm afraid."

"No, I like it. I have never had such a fine time as I have these two weeks. I hate to think it is over."

"But why should it be over?"

"I must go home. I've been with you a week longer than I expected. I'm afraid I've worn out my welcome."

"Can it! Worn out your welcome, nothing! I've had a good time too, seeing you have a good time. I wouldn't have gone to half the things alone, and this little spurt of gaiety has done me a lot of good, although"—and she put her fingers behind her ears—"I'm afraid I loosened my stitches. I've laughed a lot, really laughed, not smiled."

Eleanor smiled a little mechanically and started to get up from her chair.

Mildred reached over and pushed her back into the chair. "Sit *down*. I want to talk to you, and I can't if you keep fussing around. I want to talk seriously."

"What about?" said Eleanor without much interest.

"About what you are going to do. Rafaelo and Gorman were both after me this afternoon to find out about it, and I said I didn't know, you hadn't said anything to me. Gorman said you had turned down his proposition. What did you do that for?"

"Well—because I told him that I can't do it. I must go home. My husband wouldn't allow me to go into the movies."

"Shucks, allow you nothing. Why wouldn't he?"

"Why—why—he just wouldn't."

"Tell me, Eleanor, are you crazy about him?"

"Well—I am fond of him."

"Yes, I know, but has love's young dream lasted these twenty-four years? I think you said you had been married twenty-four years."

"Yes, twenty-five nearly."

"Are you still crazy about each other?"

"I—I—well, I know Tom cares for me. He's always been awfully good to me."

Mildred was quiet for a time, then she said:

"What you going to do when you go home? Anything special you are interested in?"

"No, nothing special."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"The usual thing, I suppose. Take care of my house, bridge, teas, women's lunches and dinners."

"Small-town society; I know. But do you like it?"

"Well, I did."

"Yes, but how about going back to it? You've seen something different. Not society, as it is called with

a capital S, but you've seen our life, which is interesting, with interesting people. How can you stand the small-town people with small-town minds again?"

Eleanor threw her hands outwards towards Mildred.

"That is what is worrying me nearly to death, Mildred. I feel I can't go back to it. I like this life, I like the people,—I—I——"

"You've had a taste of red pepper, and black pepper isn't strong enough. It isn't that we're sporty or gay, but we're all interested in something, in our work or in other people's work, and that makes us interesting. I should think women who had raised their children, and husband was comfortably fixed so wife didn't have to do the housework, would go crazy for something to do."

"I was always doing something; I was very busy."

"Yes, but doing what?"

"Oh, I was a member of several clubs and on committees—and I—I, well—I can't tell exactly what I did, but every hour was taken."

"Oh, I know the kind of stuff. But that's not *doing* anything; that's simply spending time. It's interesting for a year or two, but any woman with the brains of a chicken gets fed up on it after the second season. I have a friend who used to be a press agent. She worked for years, and you know a press agent hasn't a bed of roses. She was one of the best, and drew down a big, fat salary. Well, she married a playwright and one day he made a big hit and they decided that Elsa should stop work. She did, and she went off

her bean. She couldn't go around with the women she had known, as they were working, and she was sort of out of it. Then she tried the other kind, the kind that only amuse themselves—bridge, teas, lunches, dinners and that kind of thing. One day I went up to see her and she was embroidering some kind of a doily. It seemed funny to me to see her sitting there like a little housewife embroidering. I laughed. I had always seen her in her office, efficient, keen-minded, interested in all that was going on in her world. She saw my smile and she started to cry. 'Yes, laugh! Look at the damn thing!' she said. 'I've embroidered a hundred of them, I think, and given them to my friends. But I can't read all the time, and I'm tired of people who are just "living"—why, no one knows —so I stay at home and make these things. Sometimes I wish Sang hadn't made that wad of money. Then he wouldn't feel I ought to be a lady and do nothing.'

"When I left her I saw Sang and I said to him: 'Sang, Elsa's going bughouse. You put her back to work or you'll be putting her in a sanitarium.' He got me, and she went ahead of Maxine the next year and was all right in six weeks. She's working still and as happy as a clam. No, if you don't do something real with your time, the biggest gift the good Lord gives you, he puts your brains entirely to sleep so's you can't think, or else he makes you so discontented and unhappy wondering what's it all about that you have nervous prostration and all your friends say:

'Isn't it too bad! Poor Mrs. Smith has had a nervous breakdown. Too much work.' Work nothing. Too much buzzing around like a pinwheel."

"But then a home and a family take time—and that is creative, isn't it? Making a home and taking care of one's family?"

"Sure, the best kind of creative work. If you're bringing up your children and making a nice home for Jimmy and his friends, that's the biggest kind of work. Don't I know that? I got four kids myself. But when they're grown, that's the time the women get restless. Now you know that you don't do your own housework, and half an hour in the morning will tell the grocery man to bring up the coffee and the potatoes and the butcher can be phoned to bring a sirloin steak and country sausage. If you count your clothes yourself when you send them out to the laundry, half an hour will do that. If they're done in, even that small amount of grey matter isn't wasted. You buy your clothes, underclothes and all, ready made or have a fitting with a dressmaker once a week. You may patch John's socks and see that his neck-bands aren't torn, but that can be done in an hour or two every week. Take it all in all, two hours a day is about all you can put in being domestic. So what are you going to do with the other ten or twelve?"

"I don't know; I seemed to find enough."

"Yes, I bet I know. You went shopping in the morning. Instead of making a list, as we working

women do, and buying everything in one morning's trip, you sniddled it along, one thing today, another thing tomorrow. It gave you an excuse to rubber at the things you couldn't buy. Then you spent the afternoons with a lot of women at a tea or bridge or both. And you met the same people who said the same kind of things. By the way, that makes me think about exclusiveness. You know I think that is the stupidest thing I know. To be exclusive, to know only one set, one kind of people. I remember a woman was calling on me once, a friend of my sister's, who wanted to see how the other half lived. Nell Grey blew in—well, she looks rather sporty, but she's as decent as an onion, and my sister's friend looked at her as if she was out of the Zoo.

"Well, one day I was up to Kate's and she was reproaching me for introducing Nell to her lady friend. She said, 'Mrs. Beacham saw her on the street one day and crossed to the other side. She didn't want to know her.' I lost my temper, I guess, 'cause I could feel myself getting spotted, which I do when I get excited. I said: 'If your dumbbell friend would know some one else outside of what I suppose she calls her set, she might get a little action in her atrophied brain cells. She's known only her own kind and talked the same kind of things for so long, that she's about as broad as a stick of chewing-gum and as much use in life. Good to chew on if you can't find something better. Can't you see that the more kind of people you know, people who are thinking different

things and doing different things, then, even if you haven't any brains of your own, you must absorb a little from them. I think doctors ought to know manicurists or vaudeville performers, artists should know engineers, and show people ought to mix a bit with buyers in a store or just plain garden home people. Break out in a new place, don't sit in the same pew in the same church forever. But—well, this isn't getting us anywhere. I began this monologue to find out if you're going to try a new break."

"Really, Mildred, I'd love to do it—if I only could ——"

"Now, I am not going to influence you. I don't want to break up a happy home. By the way, are you rich or poor or just middling?"

"We are very much just middling."

"You must have something, as this beauty doctor is not working in a philanthropic cause."

Eleanor flushed. Mildred noticed it but said nothing.

Finally Eleanor said: "I—I borrowed the first money—on—on my personal note."

"Does your husband know about it?"

"Not yet, but he will, as I must ask him for the money."

"How much was it?"

"Eighteen hundred."

"But you couldn't get all you've had done and live three months for that."

"No; I had to send to Tom and he sent me some more."

"Well, you'll have to pay the eighteen hundred anyway."

"Yes, and I ought to pay what Tom has spent. I know he had to borrow, but I had to have it."

"Of course, we women always *have* to have it. But you could do it easy enough if you can get in the pictures."

"But—but—I am new, and—and——"

"Well, it isn't as if you were breaking in without backing. Gorman likes you and I like you and Rafaelo more than likes you—that's the reason I say it's a shame to pass over such a chance. Most people I know would sell their skin to get your chances—and 'you don't know.' You make me tired—you really make me tired. Did Gorman tell you what he'd pay you?"

"No, because I told him I couldn't do it."

"Now, take it from me, Eleanor, unless you got to go home, unless it'll make a break with friend husband, which same thing I don't believe in, permanent breaks; unless you don't like the work, unless you don't like the people, give it a try. You can always go home when everything else is closed up. You aren't tied for life, you don't have to make a contract for more than one picture—Gorman won't want to till he knows how you take—and then you can go home and sit by the little old fireside and knit for the rest of your life."

Eleanor got up and moved around the room.

"Oh, I'd love to—I'd love to—but——"

"Can the buts, Eleanor. You've got the biggest

chance ever came to a woman. That is what it seems to me, because the movie world is my world, and to get into it with the backing you've got—well, it seems too good to be true. When I see how just as pretty women as you are work, how they wait, how they lose heart and go back to their hall bedrooms—well, perhaps I am prejudiced, but you see because it is the world in which I move and circulate and have my being and make my bread and butter and cake for the kids, it is the biggest and onliest world there is to me. I suppose it is the same with everybody, their world is the only world. If I was a lawyer and you had the chance to be in the law game, commencing at the top with Elihu Root backing you, I'd say you were a fool not to give it a chance. But——" and she rose from her chair. "You know your own business and you've got to decide. That little two hundred dollars per week that Gorman offers you, with a good fat raise if you're all to the good, doesn't make any difference, I presume. A little money of one's own isn't bad, let me tell you." She started towards the door.

Eleanor came to her.

"Did Mr. Gorman tell you that he would give me two hundred dollars a week—a *week*?"

"Sure, he said a week. What did you think he would mean, a month? Why, if you're any good you can be making your little thousand a week in a few months."

Eleanor walked to the window. She wanted to think. Mildred watched her for a moment, then she softly

went to the door, opened it and stepped outside. As she was in the hall she laughed. "I guess that put some energy in her dynamo. I bet in the little old home town two hundred a week would buy the town hall with the mayor included."

CHAPTER XIV

ELEANOR sat long into the night staring straight before her. She did not know what to do. She knew what she wanted to do. She wanted to live in this new world, to be part of this new world. She dreaded the thought of going back to the small town, where her amusement was a dance or dinner with friends she had known all her life, whom now she considered "provincial." The dances at the club that she had organized and thought so very chic, seemed stupid. The only shows were those brought there by the second or third companies sent out from New York. Of course there were the movies and they were the same in Marysville as in New York. Yet they were given without the setting of a wonderful orchestra, the fine vaudeville performance before the feature, and all the luxury with which the New York movie houses lures its patrons.

There was Rafaelo. Eleanor felt, sitting there alone, that she was not in love with Rafaelo; she was sure of that, but she was fascinated. This Mexican, who called himself a Spaniard, was different from any man she had ever seen. He was ardent, impetuous, he simply swept her off her feet with his Latin love-making. How she thrilled to his touch when he took her into his arms and whispered "Querida mía," his

great black eyes looking into hers. When he was with her, which was practically every evening, she couldn't resist him. She felt she loved him as madly, as passionately, as he loved her. When she was away from his dominating personality, she was remorseful, often determined not to see him again. Eleanor was not an immoral woman; she had been raised in a small town with all of a small town's conventions. And to her a married woman who allowed another man to take her in his arms and make love to her was violating the greatest commandment of her religion.

Eleanor did not realize it, but vanity more than actual love was the dominating feeling she had for Rafaelo. He was the movie idol of the world today. Everywhere they went she was followed by envious eyes. She knew that nearly every woman they passed would like to be in her place. It drew attention to herself, and she saw the admiration for herself. She heard people say: "Aren't they stunning!" She knew that she was looked upon as a beauty, a fitting mate for the famous Rafaelo Cortez. Vanity had been Eleanor's besetting sin. If she had not been a vain woman she would not have become so discontented with her fading beauty, she would not have risked her remaining looks for an experiment, she would not have risked losing Tom's love and care, which even in her selfishness she was compelled to appreciate and acknowledge to herself. And now this vanity and love for admiration was being fed, although a vain, foolish woman can never be given all that she desires in that line.

The saturation-point cannot be reached with any woman, and it was so with Eleanor. She knew she held her own, so far as beauty was concerned, with the beautiful women of the theatrical world in New York, and there are no more exquisite pieces of femininity than are on the stage in that city of bright lights. She had what she had hungered for all her life, a lover like those in the foolish novels of her girlhood, admiration from many men and envious looks from women, a life of gaiety. How could she go back to Tom, to women's lunches, to bridge-teas and to family dinners? How could she go back to *casino*?

Then this temptation to show her beauty to the world, to be perhaps a movie queen, to have her picture in the papers, to have articles written about her, to have her clothes described in the Sunday journals, to be interviewed on what she considered happiness, when the next war would come, whether women should go into public life—all of the things she had seen written about the women whose names are headlined in the Sunday papers. We must acknowledge that the temptation was great. Few women of Eleanor's type and calibre of brain would have hesitated as long as she had. The movies seem to have a peculiar lure for women, even the most sensible willing to try its perilous waters if given a chance. Eleanor realized she had a chance, an opportunity few women were given. But—— She should be admired that under the circumstances she even said "but."

At last when it was nearly daylight Eleanor went

to her bed and to sleep. She did not rise the next morning until noon, and when the maid brought in her coffee, she found a note from Mildred saying that she was compelled to be at the office of her manager and would return about four o'clock. Eleanor was glad to be alone. But she was not destined to be alone. About two o'clock, Rafaelo came in. Eleanor did not know that he had seen Mildred and Mildred had said to him: "Go and see Eleanor. She's on the fence. To do or not to do, that is the question with her. If you don't want her slipping off to Squeedunk, you'd better get busy and get it cinched."

Rafaelo thought he was very much in love with Eleanor. He had thought the same thing of many women, but he felt he was sure this time. She was beautiful, she was not so sophisticated that she insisted on holding the center of the stage, he knew that she thought him only a little below the gods and it fed his vanity, which with Rafaelo Cortez, took the place of a heart. And, although he felt that she loved him, she had always held him at a little distance, a thing that piqued him. Women, since his dark face had been pictured in hero parts on the silver screen, had taken the part of the pursuer, and Rafaelo, although an actor, was still something of a man, and man-like he preferred the part of pursuer instead of being the pursued one. He did not analyze it, but Eleanor was the object of his rather fickle affections at the present moment, and the thought that he might lose her was not at all agreeable to the spoiled boy.

Eleanor rose from an easy-chair as Rafaelo entered. He came to her quickly, in the same impetuous manner she had seen him cross the stage to the movie heroine, and took her in his arms. "Querida mía, what is this that I hear? You are not going away from me, from Rafaelo?" Eleanor allowed herself to be kissed, allowed all the little caressing touches to hair and face and hands that Rafaelo knew only too well how to give. As always when he was with her, she yielded to the fascination he had for her. He led her to the big easy-chair, seated her in it, then sat on the broad arm, his head touching her head, his lips from time to time touching her hair or kissing the fingers he held within his own.

"You will come with us, Eleanor mía." Eleanor loved the little foreign way he spoke her name. "You will come with us."

Eleanor did not answer. Yet in her heart she knew that she would go.

"Ah, Eleanor, we will be in one big picture, my next picture after this new one. We will be together and I will love you as I love you now, I will kiss you as I kiss you now——"

"But, Rafaelo, you know I am married."

"Yes, but what is that? Mildred told me and you were honest with me, querida mía, when you saw the great love I had for you; you told me you could not be mine. But what is marriage—poof!" and he kissed his fingers airily and wafted the ghost kiss into the air. "What is marriage?"

"To me, Rafaelo, it is a very great and sacred thing."

"Ah, yes, it is great and sacred, if two people love each other as we love each other. But without love, what is it, a thing to be dissolved, a thing to be cut asunder—but we will not talk of the marriage; I do not like the subject. We will talk of the happiness we will have together, of the work we will do. We will make your name great, you will be the leading lady of Rafaelo Cortez—I will not sign a contract unless you are with me——"

At that moment Mildred came into the room. She was tired and cross.

"What do you think of that? I waited in that office for one hour and seven minutes. Me, at my time of life waiting in any front office. I'll see him in—Jennie——" and she raised her voice. "Jennie——" There was no answering footstep. "I'll bet it's Thursday and that girl is out. On pay days and Thursdays I envy the cook. Well, I'll get it myself. I'm entitled to my one drink——"

She left the room. Rafaelo bent down and whispered to Eleanor, using all his fascination. Touching her hair, her forehead, her cheeks with his caressing lips. "Thou wilt go with me, querida mía, promise Rafaelo?"

Eleanor's face flushed and her eyes softened. She could not withstand Rafaelo when he used his wiles. His charm was too great. It simply overcame her. "I—I—will try——"

Rafaelo put his head back and laughed triumphantly. Mildred came into the room with a glass in her hand.

"What's the joke? Want a drink, Rafaelo? Eleanor can't have one. She hasn't the habit, so I tell her not to get it. Don't smoke, nor drink, unless you have to."

"Yes, I'll take one. We'll celebrate. Have you any champagne?"

Mildred stopped the glass halfway to her lips, and looked at Rafaelo as if she did not understand him.

"Champagne? Say, how do you get that way? What do you suppose I am? Where'd I get champagne? No, I got two bottles of gin in there, made by my chemist husband. Some one gave him some pure alcohol, he analyzed it, and I put the juniper into it, and we got only those two bottles left. Make a rickey for yourself, there's some lemon squeezed. I'm tired."

Rafaelo went into the kitchen and soon returned with his drink.

Mildred said: "What was the grand laugh I heard when I came in, and why do you feel the occasion is worth a bottle?"

Rafaelo took his place beside Eleanor again, and said: "Eleanor has said she will try—do you hear it—try—to go with us."

"Good for you, Eleanor. That's the baby. If you try anything hard enough you'll succeed. I'm a New Thoughter in that belief. How you going to try?"

Eleanor spoke softly. "I don't know—I hadn't thought. I must get my husband's consent——"

Mildred interrupted her.

"Her husband's consent. Am I getting deaf, or don't you speak good English? Here is a lady saying she must get her husband's consent, and she lives in the year 1927, when we all believe in self-expression, and to hell with anything or anybody who don't let us express. In the language of the poet, I'll be damned!"

Eleanor flushed. "But I can't go unless he says I may—I won't go absolutely against Tom's wishes ——"

Mildred was quiet for a moment, then she said in a different tone: "You're right, Eleanor. I talk a lot, but when it comes right down to doing a thing, I wouldn't go against Jack. We talk everything over, and if he don't agree with me, I talk him down. Any woman who's not tongue-tied can do that. But if he puts his foot down and I can't make him see the light, *my* light, I mean, I give in."

Rafaelo frowned. "I do not think it necessary. It is a great career Eleanor has before her. He should not object, he cannot. I will not allow her to abide by his decision."

Mildred deliberately turned and looked at Rafaelo.

"You! Who are you? What have you got to say about it? Now, look here, little man, I'm for Eleanor going into the movies; I think she'd make a hit. But I'm not for her breaking up her home. Her home'll

be there when the movies for her ain't nowhere. If she's a flop, she can always go home; if she isn't, if she is the success she may be, still she'll like to be able to set on the front porch at home, and know the welcome on the mat in front of the door is for her, and have a man she knows is all to the good holding out his arms to her. The movies is all right, I ain't hitting my profession, but they don't last forever, and home and a good husband does. Eleanor is going to get her husband's consent or she ain't going if I have to cord her up and ship her home as baggage."

Eleanor laughed. Rafaelo was plainly angry.

"I cannot understand you," he said. He got up and moved around the room. Then he came to Mildred, who looked up at him over her glass with a laugh in her eyes. She did not especially like Rafaelo, she knew his type and his kind; but he did not know that. His conceit was so overpowering that it never for once entered his head that any woman could dislike him. "I do not understand you at all. Do you not want Eleanor to come with us? Do you not want her to make good in this work which we will do together? I have promised her that when I make my next contract I will say that she must be with me."

Mildred nodded her head. "I understand the great honor you do her, Rafaelo, and I also understand that if she plays with you she is already made. But you talked of making good. There are several ways of making good, and I don't think that leaving a husband and a home, not to speak of others, is the beginning

of what I call making good. Eleanor is not a chicken, and it only means a few years, and perhaps she won't like it. It's a hard life, and after the novelty has worn off, it's work, not play as the outsider thinks. She may want mighty hard to wipe the makeup off and go back to the peaceful fireside and read the *Ladies' Home Journal*. When she's trapesing around on location, she'll think many a time of the quiet and the peace of the little street. And, believe me, when some director is yelling at her through a megaphone, and some wop is pawing over her in a scene, she'll wish she could see her Tom, and hear the local news read to her as Father skims the evening paper. It may not seem romance with a capital R, but it's a hell of a nice thing to know you can go to when you're tired."

Rafaelo walked up and down the room and with his love for acting saw himself as a stage hero thwarted in his plans. He ran his hands through his black hair; he gave a very good scene of angry despair.

Mildred watched him and laughed.

"Why do you laugh at me?" He stopped in front of her again. "Why laugh? Eleanor said she would try. Now you talk to her about home and husband and as if she would not be a success—I do not understand you."

"No, you wouldn't," Mildred answered dryly. "It's past you. But Eleanor does." She watched Rafaelo as he roamed around the room, then she said:

"Sit down, Rafaelo. You make me nervous. And you'll spill your drink. That's good gin and I'll never

have any more. Don't waste it. Talk sense. Sit down, I say." Rafaelo went to a chair and sat down sulkily. "Good—now stop emoting. You'll tear your stitches—— No, I guess I'm mistaken in my line. I'll tear mine if you don't stop. I'll get riled up and I don't care to. If I get good and fat and mad at you, Rafaelo, I'll have to stay in bed a day to repair the damage, and I haven't the time to waste. Now stop seeing yourself in the hero's part. You're not on a scene and there's nobody watching your very good acting. It flatters Eleanor but it riles me. So come to earth. Now we're going to fix this thing up. Eleanor is going to telegraph her Tom to come here, and she's going to ask him and I'm going to talk to him, and if I know my onions, which I think I do, he'll not like it, but he'll say: 'Well, try it, if it makes you happy.' "

Eleanor leaned forward. "Yes, that's just what Tom will say. He will say, 'Do it if it makes you happy.' He always wants me to be happy."

Mildred turned to Rafaelo. "What'd I tell you? I think I'll like that bird. Now we'll fix up a telegram and I'll phone it."

"I object——" Rafaelo started his sentence but did not finish it. Mildred turned on him like a flash.

"Your objections be damned! Sit down, I say. I'm running this thing. I'm just as anxious that Eleanor goes with us as you are, but she's going *right*. Do you hear me?"

Rafaelo subsided into his chair, a helpless, dazed

look on his face. It had been a long time since he had been ordered to do anything, especially ordered in the tone that Mildred used. Mildred got a pencil and pad and sat down at a table.

"Mr. Thomas Wakefield,
Marysville, Indiana.
Can you come here at once. Wish to consult you matter important.

Eleanor."

"How's that?" she asked as she read the telegram.

"I object," said Rafaelo, sulkily.

"Objections overruled," said Mildred dryly. "Is that all right, Eleanor? Will that bring him?"

"Yes, but don't you think I ought to go to him?"

"No, I want to talk to him myself. If you went back, quite likely you couldn't make him see it, and either you'd bolt and spoil the rest of your life, or you'd give up and always be discontented, and make everybody's life a hell, your own included. You're going into the movies, but you're going in the front door."

Mildred rose. "Now, beat it, Rafaelo. I want some rest. I been mad twice today and I'm not supposed to have emotions, so I must lie down and think thoughts of joy and peace and beauty and get my face back in shape. Believe me, I got to put you and that cussed Gorman that kept me waiting one hour and seven minutes, out of my mind. There ain't no joy nor peace

in the thoughts of either one of you. *Good-night.* Here's your hat, don't go."

Before Rafaelo realized it, he was outside the door, without having a chance to say good-by to Eleanor.

Mildred came back laughing. "That wop gets my goat once in awhile. I don't see how you can have him around so much. He's all right in a distant scene, but as a closeup I don't get him. Now I'll phone this message."

She went over to the telephone and gave the message. Then she came back and sat down.

"Now, Eleanor, I'm glad you've made a decision. I suppose some would think I was advising you wrong to get you to even think of the movies. But I've studied you some since you been with me, and I kind o' think I got your number. No, don't get mad; I ain't knocking you, but I know you. You're vain, you're crazy for admiration, you want to be told you're beautiful, and you want romance. Well, I got a hunch you'll get all of the latter article you want with this dago, and if I don't miss my guess, you'll gag at the word some day. If you go back to the little home town, you'll be discontented and unhappy, and every time you go to a show, you'll think you might be taking the beautiful heroine's part, and you'll grouch and make life miserable for every one around you. You'll get a lot of guff given you about your phenomenal beauty; we'll have to hand it to you, you are not hard to look at, and I really do think you'll make good. And of course, as I said before and as I'll yell from the

top of the Flatiron Building, it seems a shame to have such a chance go to waste. With Rafaelo and Gorman back of you—that combination don't happen in a thousand years. Rafaelo might try to back some chicken he was interested in, but not Gorman. He believes in you, or he wouldn't risk his money. He isn't falling for anybody's girl, even Rafaelo's. I like his nerve, Rafaelo's," and she mimicked his voice and his broken accent: " 'When I make my next contract, I will say that she must be with me.' Rot, and believe me, Eleanor, you'll be a darned sight better off without him than with him. He wants to hog all the scenes, and no matter what he tells you now, if you get over too strong, and he thinks you're getting the glad hand instead of him, he won't play. He's a spoiled wop, and when a wop is spoiled, he *smells*. Well, I must lie down and give my face a rest. You'd better do the same."

Eleanor went to her room, wondering what she would say to Tom.

CHAPTER XV

ELEANOR went to the station to meet Tom. She was very nervous, wondering what he would say to her, what he would think of her. She wondered if he would recognize her. In the distance she saw Tom and Peggy.

As they came through the gates, scanning the faces of the people lined up waiting for their friends, they passed Eleanor by, evidently not recognizing her. She waited until they were through the crowd, then she went up to Tom and, taking him by the arm, said: "Hello, Tom dear." He turned and stared at her, and Eleanor felt that she was repaid for all her trouble and work when she saw the look of surprise, amazement and then delight that broke over Tom's face. He dropped his bag and took her in his arms and kissed her. Then he held her back and looked at her. "Nell, my little Nell, what have they done to you?" Eleanor laughed a little happy laugh. "They made me over as I said they would."

Peggy looked at her mother as if she could not believe her eyes. Eleanor started to take her in her arms, but Peggy stepped backward. "For the love of Mike, Ninny, don't touch me, you're uncanny."

Eleanor was embarrassed. "But, Peg, I'm your mother. Aren't you going to kiss me?"

"Had I ought to? I'd feel as if I was kissing the Statue of Liberty. You certainly are a hummer. Dad, what'll we do with her?"

Eleanor said a little crossly: "Stop being so foolish. Pick up those bags and come with me. People will think there is something wrong with me."

They entered a taxi and Eleanor gave Mildred's address. There was nothing said at first; both Tom and Peggy stared at Eleanor as if they had never seen her before. Eleanor asked them questions about home, about Beth, about the farm. She talked fast, as she was nervous, and did not notice that she received practically no replies to her questions. If Eleanor had not been convinced before of the change that Dr. Sherman had made in her looks, the astonishment on the faces of her husband and daughter was ample proof that a seeming miracle had taken place.

When they arrived at Mildred's she took Tom to her room and then Peggy was taken to the room occupied by one of the daughters when at home. She said: "Change your dress, Peggy, and we'll all meet in the living-room in about half an hour. I want you to meet Mrs. Long. She's an actress, but you'll like her." She went over and kissed Peggy. "I am so glad you came with Dad."

"Why, I had to. He was off his bean entirely. He thought you had got in some trouble or was sick. I had to come to keep him calmed down. What's it all about?"

"Never mind now. We'll talk it over in the living-room with Mrs. Long."

She left the room in order that Peggy would not ask her more questions. Tom was waiting for her in her room, and he drew her down on his lap. She snuggled up against him; she really was fond of Tom. He patted her and pressed her against him, happy that he had his Nellie with him again. After a time he pushed her back where he could look into her face. "What is the trouble, Nellie? You aren't sick, I can see that. Anything wrong?"

"No," said Eleanor. "I want to talk over something with you. But not now—wait until we are in the living-room. Mrs. Long will tell you about it."

"Who's Mrs. Long?"

"The lady I've been living with these last two weeks. She is an actress; don't be shocked, Tom, if she uses a lot of slang and perhaps swears a little—she is a fine woman, and you'll like her when you know her."

"An actress? What are you doing with an actress?"

Tom's voice plainly said that he did not approve of actresses. He had never seen one away from the stage, and his ideas of theatrical people was gleaned mainly from the scandals retailed about them in the Sunday papers.

"I have been visiting her. She is lovely, Tom. Her husband is here, and she has four children. They're in school, but she is a good mother and—and—she is not at all what you think."

Tom was evidently trying to figure out why his wife was living with an actress, but he had no chance to say more, as Mildred called from the hall. "Come on, you people, I want to meet you."

Eleanor rose, went to the mirror and arranged her hair, powdered her face, applied a little rouge, and, taking Tom by the hand, they went to the living-room where Mildred was waiting for them.

Eleanor led Tom to Mildred.

"Mildred, this is Tom."

Mildred took Tom's hand in both of hers and smiled up at him in her charming, kindly way. She would say that she was registering the "mother" smile. Eleanor noticed that her eyes were not penciled nor the rouge overly strong and the lip-stick had not been used at all. The antagonistic look that had been in Tom's eyes since he heard the word "actress" faded, and he smiled back into the laughing eyes that were waiting for his verdict. Eleanor could see that Tom liked her—perhaps against his will, but it was evident that Mildred Lee would change his opinion of actresses from now on.

The door opened and Peggy entered. Mildred looked at her wonderingly. Eleanor stepped forward and taking Peggy by the hand led her to Mildred.

"This is a surprise, Mildred. Peggy came with Tom."

A smile of real pleasure came to Mildred's face as she looked at the pretty girl. She reached out her hand. "Now, I am glad. Your mother has talked so much about you. It was nice of you to come."

Peggy was a little shy before this woman of the world, and murmured some conventional phrase. She saw the artificial woman much more than her father did, and she also was prejudiced at the word "actress." Her eyes unconsciously hardened. Mildred pretended she did not see the look, and went to a chair.

"Now let's all sit down and have a real visit."

She talked on about their trip and things in general, then she said: "Well, what do you think of her?" pointing to Eleanor.

They both looked at the beautiful woman as she sat in the big easy-chair, the lamp light on her hair, the exquisite face, the slender figure. Tom's eyes softened; one could see without any words from him what he thought of her. Peggy's look was more critical. One would almost think that she resented this new mother.

"I think she is a bird, but——"

"No buts. Isn't she wonderful? Would you ever think it could be done? Before she came I was Exhibit A. You wouldn't think I had been made over from attic to cellar? If your mother hadn't seen me, she'd 'a' lost her nerve and taken the first train back to home and fireside. But when she saw me, and found out I was three years older than she was, it decided her. How old do you think I am?"

Peggy studied her for a moment. "Oh, about thirty, I should judge."

Mildred put her head back and gave a hearty laugh.

"That sounds good to me. I'm fifty-two my next birthday."

Both of the visitors stared at her. "It can't be possible!" said Peggy. Mildred said: "Well, the age of miracles aren't past. I had to have the doctor break loose or he might have put me back in my swaddling clothes with a nursing bottle."

Tom looked at her and then at his wife. Then he said, turning to Eleanor: "Why did you telegraph me, Nell? Not just to show me your new face; you could have done that at home."

"No—no——" Eleanor did not know just how to begin. Mildred helped her out.

"Eleanor has a chance to go into the movies and wants to go."

If Mildred had dropped a bomb into the room it could not have created more consternation. Peggy and Tom both looked at her as if they had not understood what she said. Finally Peggy said: "The movies? My God!"

Mildred flushed and an angry glint came into her eyes.

"What's the matter with the movies?" she inquired.

"My mother, in the movies?" Peg half whispered.

"I am in the movies and I am a mother, got just as nice girls as anybody's," said Mildred.

"Yes—but—but——" faltered Peggy.

Tom turned to Eleanor. "What does she mean, Nell? You go into the movies?"

"Just what she says, Tom. I have had an offer to go into the movies."

"But you'd never think of such a thing, Nell!" said Tom.

"Why not?" answered Eleanor shortly.

"I can't imagine it," said Tom. "My wife wanting to go into the movies!"

Mildred spoke up sharply. "I am a wife too, got one of the nicest husbands in the world, and he isn't ashamed that his wife is in the movies."

"But it's different," said Tom. "Perhaps he's an actor or something," and the "something" seemed to imply that whatever it was it couldn't amount to much.

"He's no actor, never saw one until he saw me do my stunt at the Orpheum."

Tom was quiet. He could not understand that his wife, his Nell, wanted to go into the movies. Then he was moved to anger. His face flushed and he rose from his chair and came and stood over Eleanor. "What do you mean, Nell? I thought that when you'd gratified all this nonsense about getting your face peeled or whatever they did to you, you'd be satisfied and come home. Now you want to leave your home. What's the matter with you?"

Eleanor flushed. "Tom, now listen to reason. You'll have to admit that the operation has been—has been—well, a success. A manager who is a friend of Mildred's has offered me a position."

"And you want to go?"

"Yes, I want to go."

Tom looked at her a moment, then turned and left the room.

The three women looked at the closed door, and said nothing. After a silence that seemed an hour, but which was only a few moments, Peggy laughed:

"Well, you've done it at last, Ninny. I always said the worm would turn."

Eleanor looked nonplused. She had thought that Tom would object, but as usual he would give in when he saw that she was really wanting this new thing. But that he would not even stay to argue the question was beyond her. She did not know how to meet it.

Finally Mildred said: "Let me go to him. I may make him see the light. You come with me, Peggy."

They found Tom walking up and down Eleanor's room, his face flushed, an angry light in his eyes. Mildred went up to him and put her hand on his arm. "Come, sit down, Mr. Wakefield. I want to talk to you."

"There's nothing to talk about. I will not listen to you."

"Yes, you will listen to me. I want you to hear Eleanor's side."

"There's nothing to be said. She can do as she pleases. If she wishes to leave me and her home, she is at liberty to do so."

"But that is the point. She does not want to leave you, nor leave her home. And she would not go without your consent. You must give the devil his

due—she could have gone and you would not have known anything about it."

Tom said nothing. Mildred watched him as he walked up and down the room, then she said: "Sit down, Mr. Wakefield. There in that chair. Sit down, Peggy. We'll talk it over calmly and if you are still of the opinion that Eleanor should go home with you —she'll go. Sit down."

Tom sat down. Mildred was facing the two. She was quiet a moment, as she watched Tom fumbling in his vest pocket. "Wait, you want a cigar. Jack has some good ones." She was out of the room and back in a moment with a cigar, matches and an ash-tray. She moved a small table to the side of Tom's chair, then sat down.

"Now, I'll have a cigarette, and we'll all be happy." She lit her cigarette, drew a few long puffs, and said:

"Mr. Wakefield, I presume you can blame me for Eleanor's desire to go into the movies. I saw her first when she came to Dr. Sherman for treatment, then I saw her after the treatment. I was sure paralyzed. I liked her, and seeing she was alone in New York, asked her up to my house. Now, I live in the movie and theatrical world; I don't know anything else. I introduced Eleanor to the only people I knew, movie people, and she made a hit. She is beautiful. Now to me to be beautiful or have any charm that can be commercialized—well, it seems a shame to waste it. Like a man having a great business ability and living on the farm and taking care of the guernseys. I

pumped around and found you weren't rich, that she had no children to look after, and that she wouldn't be doing any one harm by working. So I just naturally backed it up when Gorman, the manager, saw her possibilities. It was a chance in a thousand."

Tom grunted.

Mildred said: "You don't see it, perhaps. But, believe me, Mr. Wakefield, an unkown woman don't get a man like Jim Gorman to say he'll even give her a tryout. She could have set around offices and studios for a thousand years and never even met him. Just as pretty women as she is, with real youth back of them, too, are hoping against hope that in some mob scene that they have had the luck to get into, a manager will see them, and give them a chance."

Tom got up from his chair and walked over to the window. Then he came back, and threw himself into his chair.

"But, Mrs. Long, my wife in the movies! What will everybody think?"

Mildred laughed. "I suppose it isn't done in your set. Well, what's the difference?"

"Yes, but—well, it upsets all my plans. I thought that when this craze was over and she had either succeeded or failed, she would be content to settle down and we would have a nice, happy, comfortable old age."

Mildred laughed. "I'm afraid I know your wife better than you do. Do you think she will ever be contented settling down into a comfortable old age?"

Peggy laughed. "Not Mother."

Tom did not answer. Mildred continued:

"Now, what will she go back to? I know. A nice home, nice friends, the usual round of small society in a small town. She was discontented before; what will she be now?"

"Oh, she'll be all right after a time."

"Yes, perhaps she'd give up—but why should she? Let her have her little fling."

"I don't see why my wife should want a fling, as you call it."

"No, most men don't. Matrimony is generally a sort of hitching-post to which a man can hitch his wife and leave her until he comes home at night."

Tom flushed and started to speak. Mildred put up her hand.

"I know all you'd say. You're not that kind of a man. You're the straight kind. But still you think that a wife should live up to the German Emperor's ideals of a wife, be concerned with kitchen, church and school. That's all right for some women. But you know Eleanor was never that kind——"

"Yes, when we were first married and when the children were little——"

"Sure, she had real things to occupy her time. She had to do her own work, had to take care of the children, was interested in the home you two were building together. Then you made more money—that's the rock on which so many matrimonial ships go to pieces. Money—too much of it. A man and

woman will live contentedly together when they are working together, for the home, for the little savings they are getting together, for the children, their education and all that goes with bringing up kids, but, when they get too much money, when they don't have to plan and work together, when the children don't need them especially, then comes the bump. When they're rich enough to own two cars, their paths begin to go apart. Father takes to chorus girls, perhaps, and Mother takes to society. They neither one of them really like it, but they think it is the thing to do—and—and—well, Mother can't see that chorus girls are means of putting in time that used to be occupied in business, and Father can't see that bridge is a means of putting in time that used to be occupied in the home and the children. She won't understand that the man who has nothing to do chases chorus girls or their kind just as naturally as a kitten does it tail, or a fox terrier a cat. So there is a grand bust up, and they spend the rest of their life in regrets. But don't let me get started on my pet theme; we will make it concrete—we're talking about Eleanor."

Mildred waited a moment, but as neither Tom nor Peggy said anything, she continued:

"I have studied Eleanor some since she's been with me. She represents a type to me. Ninety-nine people hunt for happiness. The hundredth stays at home and finds it. Now, Eleanor is one of the ninety-nine. She is vain, hasn't an awful lot of grey matter." Tom

looked at Mildred as if he would slay her; she laughed. "Don't get fussy; I am not saying she is a congenital idiot, am just saying she is the normal, garden variety of woman. She's a little above the women with whom she associates in brains and creative ability. I bet she was the leader in her set, yes?"

Both Tom and Peggy nodded.

"I thought so. She was the chief cheese in the Woman's Club, took a leading part in the Literary Society, had the armchair in the bridge-teas, and generally started things and kept them going until she grew tired of them. That's all right and regular. Gave her something to do. But she's got another side too, a little side. She is, as I said, vain. Most women are. She is jealous, although she wouldn't admit it. She hated to feel the reins slip. She wanted admiration, not only that she was clever, but she had been a local beauty and she didn't like to give up. She had two pretty daughters, and she was jealous of them."

Peggy and Tom both shook their heads.

"Yes, she was, although she was unconscious of it. She saw the boys, and that type of woman always like them young, surround her daughters and it galled her. She was 'Mother' and she didn't like the mother part in real life any more than I liked it in the movies. No woman does at first; she has to come to it gradually. Now what'll she do when she goes home, with that face made over?"

Tom said: "Oh, she'll settle down after a time."

"Yes, but she'll never be happy again, and if I know

her, you won't lead the placid life of a Jersey cow. She'll make a grand splurge at first, and chase around like a pinwheel, and all the women will get discontented and try to make their Jimmie and Johnnies cough up so they can go and do likewise. They'll have an ax for her; women who are the same age and whose faces are beginning to sag, have the bird-dog look, will give her a good probe every time she goes out of a room first. She'll have to put the lights out at every party so she can be sure she isn't canned by all her one-time friends when she leaves."

"That may be so for a time, but they'll get over it."

"Will they? You don't know women."

"But if she goes into the movies, they'll talk worse."

"They won't need to know it—for a time, at least. She won't use her name, it isn't a movie name, and when they find it out, they'll think it the grandest thing to know a movie actress. The more decent a woman, the more she admires the women of the stage, or the women who are doing things she would like to do and can't. That's the reason they read the life of Madame Pompadour and Du Barry. They'd all like to sway men and be a great courtesan, but they can't. So they do it vicariously, by reading about those who do. It's the same with the movies. Most women would like to be Constance Talmadges and Gloria Swansons, but they can't. Who pays to see the movie heroine? The women, not the men. The men like Bill Hart and Douglas Fairbanks and Chaplin. They aren't interested in clothes or the love

triangle—it's the women who thrill to the wop lover's passionate embraces. Friend husband says: 'Ah, cut it out, and get to some action.' If Eleanor asked her friends' advice they would hold up their hands in holy horror and say 'No.' That's human nature to say 'No.' People are always negative, and if you put up any proposition to them, they put the kibosh on it. But if you go and do it and it succeeds, they all say, 'Isn't it wonderful? Just the thing you should do.' That's one reason I never ask advice; I go along and do it, and if I've made a mistake I pay for it. Anyway, I've gratified my curiosity, my spirit of adventure, and generally it's worth the price."

Tom looked at Mildred and smiled for the first time.

"If that's your theory, why did you have Eleanor send for me? Why even ask my advice?"

Mildred laughed. "You've got me there. I don't know, except that I know what life is, what hard knocks Eleanor is liable to get even beginning at the top, and I don't want her to kick all the ladders out from under her. A home is a mighty good thing to have in the background. And no home is complete without a husband any more than it is without a canary bird or a cat. A man or a woman can always find somebody to share their money or their pleasures with them, but they got to have some one tied to them to share their sorrows and their troubles. That's the excuse for matrimony."

Peggy said: "You've got a high ideal of matrimony."

Mildred said dryly: "I've got common sense."

Peggy said softly: "Doesn't love play any part in your ideals of matrimony?"

Mildred looked at Peggy, as she sat there, a little flush on her pretty face. She laughed softly. "Of course, little one. Love is the shine on the jewel of matrimony, and, after all, the shine on the jewel is the whole thing. That's the reason I don't want Eleanor to drop that jewel in the mud."

"You seem to be taking a peculiar way to have her keep it," said Tom sarcastically.

"Am I? I don't think so. I've told you I've sized up your wife. If she goes home without trying this thing, she's going to be so discontented and miserable that you'll lose your love for her, and she'll hate you as the person who blocked her great c-a-r-e-e-r. She may bolt, and then the fat would be all in the fire, as there'd be a scandal."

Peggy sat with her chin on her hand, and finally said: "Now, just what is it you suggest, Mrs. Long?"

"Good, we'll get down to brass tacks. Gorman has offered Eleanor a job. A tryout, as it were, in one picture. If she goes over well, she can have a contract. Now, let her take it. She may not like the work; it ain't all just posing for your picture to be taken; it's darned hard work, and Gorman is a slave-driver. Eleanor isn't young, and she'll find it ain't easy to keep up with the pretty young girls, who have

the energy of youth, and she won't dare to let 'em know she ain't got the pep she once had. You know you can make over the face and the neck and get the pounds off, but the old heart, liver, lungs and kidneys are just the same old ones that've been working for the last fifty years, and they're liable to buck when they're worked overtime. If I know my woman, about six months will do the job for her. She'll have her vanity gratified, she'll see her pictures in the papers, which her type of woman eats alive, she'll have a chance to see herself as others see her on the screen, she'll have a lot of guff given her about her looks, and she'll have a lot more rocks thrown at her by the other movie people. You know there's a lot of competition in the business, and an aspiring beauty can hit straighter and hit harder if she thinks it's going to put her somewhere, than any other living human being. Anyway, she'll have had her fling, and maybe be contented to come back and knit."

Peggy was quiet for a time. Tom said nothing. He never was a fluent speaker and this bomb thrown into the midst of his domestic life seemed to render him completely inarticulate.

Finally Peggy straightened up.

"I think she is right, Dad. Mother'd always be rebelling—you know she's been rather hard to live with for the last few years, ever since she's been kicking so hard about getting old, and if she was bad then, what would she be now? Let her try it."

Tom did not answer for a time. Then he said:

"Bring Eleanor in here."

Peggy rose and went for her mother. As Eleanor entered the room, the telephone rang. Mildred went into the next room and her voice could be plainly heard.

"Who? . . . . Oh, you. What——? No, sir. Now, you look here, you keep away from this joint, until you hear from me. What? . . . . No—do you hear me, NO! What? . . . . Now listen to me, son. If you show up here, I'll take you by the slack of your well-fitting pants and drop you down the elevator-shaft. Do you get me? Well, see you do."

Mildred came into the room, an angry look in her eyes. "Of all the nerve!" She looked at Eleanor—they understood each other.

"We've talked it all out, Eleanor. Now your Tom wants to talk to you."

Tom went over and stood looking down on Eleanor.

"Nell, is it really true that you want to do this thing?"

Eleanor said: "Yes, Tom."

"But, Nell, I can't understand it, I can't understand you."

"What's wrong with it, Tom?"

"Nothing wrong, Eleanor. But why can't you be contented to come home and settle down and just be happy?" There was a wistful tone in Tom's voice that went to Mildred's heart. She looked at Eleanor to see what effect it would have upon her.

Eleanor's face did not soften. It had that hard,

obstinate look that both Peggy and Tom knew so well.

"I won't come back now, Tom. I know exactly what you mean by settling down, and I'm not going to do it."

"But, Nell, you were happy before."

"Was I, Tom? Was I? It's a lot you husbands know about how we wives feel. I used to get so tired of the everyday same thing that I thought I'd go mad."

Tom became angry. "What did you want? You had your home, as fine a home as any in town. You had your friends, you were always gadding around to something."

"What was I to do? Sit at home and wait for you to come? You were away all day, and at night you were generally tired and wanted to put your feet in an old pair of straw slippers and read the paper until nine, then go to bed."

"But, Nell, I had to work hard. I had to make the money that kept you and the girls. I couldn't do it by staying home and entertaining you."

"Yes, but you liked your work and you saw a lot of people and got all the company you wanted at your office or in the store. Then you came home at night and were just *dumb*."

Mildred chuckled. "As a soul companion, the main difference between a bulldog and a husband is that the dog can't talk—and the husband won't."

Tom paid no attention to Mildred's little aside, but said:

"Isn't that what home's for, to rest, not to have to sit up and take notice all the time? Of course I was dumb. I'd been nice and polite to people all day, and I wanted to rest, I say. What man likes to come home from his work and get into a boiled shirt and have to go out and talk to a lot of people, pumping up something to say and being polite and working just as hard as he's done all day, with nothing in it for him? He isn't making money and he isn't having a good time—why in hell should he do it?"

Mildred laughed. "All men are different, but all husbands are the same. From the stony silence they sink into after the honeymoon, there must be something almost unspeakable about matrimony."

Eleanor and Tom did not seem to hear her. She watched them for a moment. There was a quarrel in the air, she could plainly see, and she was wondering how she could ward it off.

Eleanor said: "You said I was gadding around all the time." Evidently the word had annoyed her. "What was I to do?"

"I don't know what you were to do. And I didn't care if you were chasing out to lunches and bridge-teas every day. And look here, Nell, you think I wasn't tired of it, too. I didn't say much, but I done a lot of thinking, and I used to be just as bored with you as you were with me, when you used to blow in just in time for dinner and tell me a lot of gossip about

Mary Smith and Polly Jones and what dress Mrs. Graves had on, and what refreshments were served and who won the prize and how badly some one played, and a lot of rot that didn't interest me, any more than if I had told you a bunch of stuff about the men I met in the store. It was fifty-fifty, this bore stuff. Supposing I did like to go into the living-room and read the paper or a good detective story for a couple of hours? I liked to get my mind off my work and forget that I was tied down behind a counter or at a desk for fourteen hours a day. It's always made you mad that I wanted to go to bed early. Well, I got up early, too. I've had to be at the store at eight-thirty for about twenty years, and I can't set up nights and not feel like a boiled owl the next day. I've worked for my living and for yours, Nell."

Mildred rose. "Well, we're not getting anywhere. Come on in the dining-room. Let's have a cocktail. I'll break over and call this a party. I heard a door slam—Jack is home. You must meet him, Mr. Wakefield; he's a sort of chemist, I guess. At least his latest hobby is stewing up smelly things in the kitchen. You may find a lot of things to talk about."

She rose and led the way into the living-room, where Jack was standing by a table on which were a lot of packages he was arranging with care. "Say, Mildred, I've been up to the Jackson laboratory——" Then he saw that she was not alone, and looked inquiringly at the three who were accompanying her.

Mildred said: "Jack, this is Mr. Wakefield and

Peggy Osborne." He shook hands with Peggy and Tom in rather an abstracted manner. One could see that he had something he was anxious to talk over with his wife.

"Sit down," said Mildred. "I'll get the wherewith." She went to the kitchen.

Tom said: "Your wife tells me you are a chemist."

Jack laughed. "Mildred compliments me. I am not a chemist, but I've always been interested in chemistry, and just now I'm interested in dye."

"Dye," said Tom. "I guess the Germans have the bulge on us in that."

"Yes, just now, but why should they? Now, I've got some samples here and I'm going to see——"

Mildred came into the room with the cocktail-shaker in her hand. She shook it vigorously, then turned to Jack and said: "Jack, go into the dining-room and get some glasses. Get those new ones Jimmie gave us for our wedding anniversary." Then turning to Eleanor and still shaking the cocktail, she said: "It's a funny thing prohibition seems to have done when it comes to presents these days. We had four cocktail-shakers given us, and three sets of glasses. Nearly everything we received had something to do with booze. I'm going to pass them on at Christmas. It'll save us a lot of money. I got the names of the senders pasted on them so I won't send them back to the person who gave them to us."

Jack came in with the glasses. She poured out the

drink, and raising her glass said: "Well, here's domestic peace at any price. Drink it standing, it's worth it."

They laughed and stood up for the drink.

CHAPTER XVI

ELEANOR went to Hollywood. She took a suite of rooms at a good hotel. The expense frightened her, but she saw every one spending money as if it were water. She borrowed five hundred dollars from Mildred, feeling that she could pay her back as soon as she was working. But she did not go to work at once. Gorman was busy on a picture and wished to finish it before he started on the one in which she was to figure. Through Mildred, Gorman and Rafaelo, Eleanor met every one in the movie world. She associated with men and women whose names were household words. She went to parties of every description. She visited the magic homes that had been built with the newly made wealth. She heard tales of colossal salaries made by women who only a few years before had been earning hardly enough to keep body and soul together.

Everywhere Rafaelo was her shadow. It was the understood thing that she and Rafaelo should be invited together.

But Eleanor had her problems. Acting young when she has passed the age of youth becomes a task which one would gladly lay down at times, though the zest for life may be as acute as ever. She was with a crowd who wanted to be always on the go. She wanted to

go, too, but physically she got tired. But she must keep up, she must go with them on their picnics, must don her hiking clothes and take long walks when she had rather lie in the hammock. She must go to a supper party after a show when she was physically tired and wanted to go home and go to bed. She was associating with a crowd that were from fifteen to twenty years younger than herself. She liked youth, but the ideas and opinions of the young men with whom she was thrown constantly, seemed at times childish. They would be all right for a short time, they would amuse her, but as a steady diet she was growing a little tired of them.

Eleanor knew her body was not as young as it once was, it told her so in plain words. She was a slave to it. She was a slave to those slim lines of her beautiful figure. Each morning she stepped on the scales, and because of what they told her, her diet was regulated. She was an authority on calories. She loved good food, and what was to her good food seemed now to contain nothing but fat-making ingredients. If the food was not barred because of its weight-producing qualities, it was because of her complexion. Only one cup of coffee, that without cream or sugar, for breakfast. For lunch, salads without dressing except a little lemon-juice did not appeal to her. She would eat her tasteless lettuce and think of the many kinds of salad dressing she could make. She would go out to dinner and pass the soup, take a small piece of fish but without the butter sauce or

the mealy potatoes that lined the dish. She ate a small slice of the roast, mentally counting the calories, and she passed the vegetables unless they happened to be spinach or some green vegetable cooked simply in salted water. The complicated salad with its roquefort dressing or mayonnaise also was allowed to go by. It was a sin for her to even think of the dessert.

At times she dreamed of food. She saw the bountiful table at home—the hot biscuits, corn muffins, the luscious pies and chocolate-filled layer-cakes. She sighed as she realized that these delectable joys must forever remain a feast for the mind only. They could never nourish her body that craved them.

No, Eleanor's path was not all rose-strewn. She was leading a life that was abnormal to her training and her traditions, and even when she tried to deceive herself and say she was happy—she knew within her heart that she was not, that she was playing a game—a new game—with which she should be delighted, but which in fact was losing its power to interest her.

At times she was actually unhappy, but—there was always Rafaelo, who exerted an influence over her that she could not explain. When with him she saw with his eyes, she thought with his mind, she was a different woman when dominated by his personality, than when alone. The trouble was, she was never alone enough to be her real self.

CHAPTER XVII

MILDRED was leaving for New York. The company were going to the Bermudas to finish their picture. She came up to see Eleanor the night before she left.

Eleanor was lying on the bed, nervous, tired out. She had been working all day. Gorman had been particularly exasperating and she had been compelled to do a scene over and over again. It is easy to register deep joy for four or five times, but when it has to be done eight or ten times the face is apt to get mechanical, and the smile look as if it were plastered there for an advertisement of "the smile that won't come off." Eleanor had been told in no uncertain tones that she was a failure in that scene, and she was discouraged.

Mildred found the easiest chair as usual, took out her cigarettes and said:

"Well, I've come to have a last heart to heart talk with you. No, don't get up. You can hear me just as well lying down. How you getting along?"

Eleanor gave a sigh. "Sometimes I seem to be getting along very well, and at others, like today, I get discouraged and think I am what you call a 'flop.'"

"Forget it; you'd know soon enough from Gorman if you were a flop. He's no philanthropist, and there's

a hundred women waiting for your job. So cheer up."

Eleanor said nothing.

"It isn't as easy as it looks, is it? People who sit in front think we just come on and do the act they see, and walk off again. They don't realize how many times we have tried to register that expression, before it makes good. Wait until I get hold of a little more dough, and I'm sure we got enough to give the kids a good education, and then me and Jack are going to sail into the country and live like human beings. I'll fix him up some kind of a workshop in a ten-acre field, so if he blows it to Kingdom Come we won't all go with it, and I'm going to eat all I want and forget my stitches and be happy. Gee—talk about dreams and visions, I tell you I got mine."

"I can't imagine you in the country. You were born on Broadway under a white light."

"Was I? Well, you got another guess coming. I know I act as if I were born on a fire-escape and didn't know an apple blossom from an orchid, but believe me, I saw the light of day on a nice little farm just on the edge of a village in Massachusetts. I wanted to see the world, and I've seen it—that is, from backstage."

"But you like it, don't you?"

"Sure, I like it and I'd do it all over again. But I've been in it twenty-five years, and I'm ready to take a rest. If it wasn't for Dr. Sherman my face'd tell I was tired. But his stitches don't let my face

tell much of anything. He ironed all the lines out, but he ironed out the expression too."

"You wouldn't change, would you?"

"Not me. I'm drawing down a good fat little payroll as the beautiful heroine instead of the small one as mother. And I like my face as is, not as *was*. I'll do it again some of these days, when the cheeks begin to drop."

"That's what is awful. It has to be done again."

"Why not? If you hadn't had it done at all, when you're fifty you'd look fifty, and when you're fifty-five you'll look sixty. Now when I'm fifty I look twenty-five, and when I am fifty-five I'll have it done again and look thirty instead of sixty. I'd keep it up indefinitely if the old face would stand it. Science is busy hustling up new things all the time; perhaps by the time the old treatment fails, something new will crop up and I'll get back to eighteen. You never can tell."

They were both quiet for a time. Mildred watched the woman lying back on the bed relaxed, tired, a peevish expression on her face.

"Stop registering sadness. It might become permanent, and you're supposed to be joyous, triumphant beauty in your new part. But I didn't come here to talk to you about face lifting, edifying though it may be. What you going to do with that wop?"

Eleanor flushed. "Whom do you mean?"

"You know who I mean. Rafaelo."

"I'm not going to do anything with him. Why?"

"Well, I just want to know. He's with you everywhere. I hear you got a part in his new picture that's going to be shot in Mexico. Is that so?"

"Yes," said Eleanor simply.

"Well, it's none of my business, but I don't like it. That greaser is no good."

"Why do you call him a greaser. He's Spanish."

"Spanish, nothing. He's a Mexican. He can't put it over me with that Spanish stuff. I bet he was born in a mud hut in Mexico and didn't wear anything but a gee string until he got big enough to register shame."

"Is that all you've got against him?"

"Well, I haven't got anything against him on general principles, but in this particular case, I don't like him. He's crazy about you, and what are you going to do with him? He'll get mad one of these days and put a knife in your back. It's done down there."

Eleanor laughed.

"You can laugh. I suppose it flatters you to have him hanging around. He has got charm, 'It,' I suppose it is called. He's a genius, I suppose. Genius may be all right, but not to have too close to you. Distance gives it enchantment, and the longer the distance the greater the enchantment. What do you hear from home?"

"Oh, they are all right."

"Are you going to sign up for another picture after this one?"

"I don't know. I am going to go to Mexico for the next one, and then have made no plans after that."

"Take a tip from me. Visit the little home town after this picture."

"I can't. We're leaving right away."

"Well, I don't like it. I hate to go away and leave you here. You got sense in some ways and in others you're just a plain damn fool. I wish I hadn't got you into it."

"What is the matter with you, Mildred? I've never been so happy in my life."

"Happy? You think you're happy because you're having a lot of fun. But pleasure and happiness are two different things. You like this life because it's different. You're seeing life, you think, because you're going to a lot of gay parties with people whose names are known to everybody. You like going into the restaurants and hotels with Rafaelo and have people point you out. It gives you a great kick. But remember it won't always last. You're no chicken and after awhile you'll hear people say: 'Isn't she going off terribly!' no matter how many times you go to Sherman."

Eleanor started to cry quietly, the tears running slowly down her face. Mildred was all contrition in a moment.

"What's the matter, honey? I don't want to hurt you, but I don't know what to do with you. I hate to leave you here with Rafaelo." She watched Eleanor for a moment.

"Tell me, dearie, do you care anything for that wop?"

Eleanor was quiet for a moment.

"I might as well tell you—I do. I don't know what it is, but I—I—love him."

Mildred was quiet. The news seemed to startle her into silence. She had not expected it. She thought Eleanor would say that she was just playing with him, that there was nothing serious in the affair.

Finally she lighted another cigarette, and looking over it at Eleanor said: "Well, I'll be damned!"

Eleanor tried to laugh through her tears. "What did you expect? He is the most wonderful——"

"Yes, I suppose 'the perfect lover' as he is billed. But I never thought of him taking it into real life."

"But he is, Mildred; he can say the most wonderful things."

"Rot—hot air. Remember it isn't the thing a man says that proves he loves you, but the things he tries to say and can't. The things that choke right up in his throat."

"I believe in Rafaelo and in his love," said Eleanor simply.

"Play-acting. Rafaelo's a natural-born actor. He's always staging a scene with himself as hero. I'll bet he stops and writes down on his cuff any good line he pulls on you, and will have a caption made out of it for his next love scene. Does he know you're married?"

"Yes,—but——"

"Well, it wouldn't make much difference to him. But what I can't see is what you see in him. On the stage, I admit, he's some grand lover. But I wouldn't want a close-up with him. He'd smell of garlic."

Eleanor flushed, and became angry.

"Mildred, what is the matter with you? He doesn't smell of garlic. He uses the most delicate perfume."

"That's worse. Lead me away from a man who uses perfume. Well, perhaps he's over the garlic stage. Had too much at home. But listen to me, Eleanor, you cut him out. Make this picture with him if you're signed up. But let that be the finish. You go home after that and see that nice husband Tom, and Peggy and that other daughter of yours, and see how you like home life again. You've made good, you can always get a job, if you want to come back. You've got about three years ahead of you when you can be a headliner."

"Three years! Why, Constance Talmadge and Gloria Swanson and Mary Pickford have been on for years."

"Yes, but they got the bulge on you a few years. They began young. You're beginning where they'll leave off, as far as years go."

"Oh, I'll stop before I look old."

"Yes, you will *not*. You'll be like the rest of us. You won't know when you look old. You'll get your first shock when some little flapper of eighteen is given the best part, and you're told to play aunt or something. It'll give you a jolt, but remember it's com-

ing. Look at good old actresses and actors in the business, who are simply support for some pretty face, that can only register what she is, a damn fool, until the director hits her over the head with a sandbag to make her register astonishment. But she's pretty and young, and she can work her eyes—and all the old stage training, the many years of fine acting doesn't count against the youth of Kitty Toddles. You know, Eleanor, the screen much more than the stage has got to have youth. You can't fool the camera with makeup. And they're picking 'em younger and younger. But I'm going to get out before I'm kicked out."

"Mildred, you seem to be all for the movies, then you seem to be dead set against it. Now, tell me, you've three girls. Are you going to put them in it?"

"I might. I don't know. They're to have a good education first. Then, if they've talent, I had just as soon they went into pictures as in anything else. Girls want to work nowadays, want to give themselves 'expression'—I think that is what it is called. I believe in a woman doing something, as I told you. The movies is a grand field, she can get more money than being a private secretary or a school-teacher. So if my Betsy or Lois want to give themselves expression in the movies, well, I'll try to see they get in right. Then it's up to them."

"But the temptations we're always hearing about!" and Eleanor laughed.

"Temptations, rot! There aren't any more tempta-

tions there than anywhere else. You always have temptations anywhere on earth if you're a pretty woman and are looking for them. No reason why a girl shouldn't be just as decent working eight hours a day on a lot as in a department store."

"Well, then, why are you against me sticking to it? I am doing well—I'm making more money than my husband——"

Mildred frowned: "Yes, and that's a rock on which many a married couple go to pieces. The wife has money and feels sort of independent. Her man isn't her man to her in the old-fashioned sense. At first she feels his equal and mighty soon she feels she's his superior. It gives a man a different feeling towards his woman too, the right kind of a man, to know he is feeding her and buying her the pretty clothes she loves and the little car that he takes her as a gift. It makes him work harder, gives him something to make money for.

"But," and Mildred rose to go, "I didn't come here to give you my ideas on a suitable profession for growing youth, nor any of the other things which I can hold forth on so fluently, and which I don't live up to. I came to say good-by, and I must say, Eleanor, I've had a shock. I didn't think you would really fall for Rafaelo—I presume I must cut out the 'wop' or you'll get sore now—and I'm struck dumb, plumb dumb."

She went over to Eleanor, who had risen and was sitting on the side of the bed. She took her by the shoulders and looked down into her face.

"I hate to leave you, Eleanor. I sure do. Will you write me? Now don't, for the love o' Mike, get into any mix-up with that w—— with Rafaelo. He isn't worth it, Eleanor. He's worth just what he is, a good movie actor. But off stage he's all to the bad. Believe me, I know them babies inside and out, and you can't tie to 'em a minute—there's nothing to tie to. Let me hear from you, and slide back home, girlie, just slide for the home plate as soon as you can, and after you get all the dust out of your eyes, you'll find it looks good to you.

"Well, good-by," and she bent down and kissed Eleanor. "No, don't get up. I can find the door. Good-by, now use that return-trip ticket that you ought to 'a' bought and didn't."

CHAPTER XVIII

ELEANOR went to Mexico with the company. Rafaelo was a hero bandit. He fitted the part exactly. It would be the best picture in his career. Often when Eleanor watched him, she remembered the words of Mildred that he was a Mexican. The life of the people was his life, he did not seem to be playing a part. He directed the picture much more than the director, who saw that Rafaelo knew what he was about when it came to native life, and acted upon his instructions. He understood how to treat the supers that had to be hired to make up the army scenes and the bandits. He acted as interpreter.

Rafaelo was not lazy. He worked hard. But he was a very different Rafaelo on the lot than when he was alone with Eleanor. Eleanor remembered that Mildred said that he would want the spotlight always and would be jealous of any one who got more glory than he thought was their due, which meant that he was the star and the only person who should have the center of the stage at all times. It was true. He was the one shining light of the firmament, around which the lesser lights might revolve, if it added to his brilliancy.

Eleanor had been with Rafaelo constantly for weeks. Mildred, with her common sense, her cutting sarcastic

remarks about Rafaelo, her subtle way of showing off his weakness to Eleanor, was gone. She saw him the center of a crowd of fawning people, who conceded that he was clever. He was a very able man, and commanded the respect of all who were working with him. He had not only a well-shaped head, but there was a great deal in that head. Because of his willingness to work and because of the intelligent interest he took in his work, directors, and in fact every one, passed by his ebullitions of temper, his sudden fits of jealousy. They laid it to "temperament," the word that covers just everyday bad disposition in everyday people. He was a genius, they said, allowing themselves a very free latitude in their interpretation of what "genius" meant. Even the stormy scenes in which Rafaelo figured had a charm for Eleanor. She had been accustomed to a quiet, self-effacing man, a man who would always give in for the sake of peace, and whose main thought was to make her happy and to make those around him happy. Rafaelo was troubled by no such scruples. When things went wrong with him, he told the world their faults in no soft voice. Their happiness or unhappiness did not enter into the subject at all. He took the center of the stage, and every one within his radius finally had to give in. This was new to Eleanor. She had always been the one who started the commotion in her domestic circle, and she it was who finished it, with every one willing to allow her to have her own way in order to quell the disturbance. But with Rafaelo there was

no chance for an argument. He could talk his broken English mixed with Spanish faster than any of his competitors and by the time he got through one of his "brain storms," the original bone of contention was entirely forgotten. The unfortunate person who had incurred his displeasure was only too glad to call it a day, breathe a sigh of relief, and according to whether it was a man or a woman, either take a drink or go home and put an ice-bag on her head.

They were coming home one evening in the moonlight, after a day spent on location where the picture was nearly finished. They were both happy at the thought that work would soon be over. Rafaelo did not expect to start his next picture for a few weeks, and Eleanor had no contract and would be free. They had been driving in silence for several miles when Rafaelo suddenly took Eleanor in his arms and said in that caressing voice that always made her thrill:

"Eleanor, Eleanor, I love you—I love you. Let us be married and be always together."

Eleanor sat up straight. An electric shot seemed to go through her. Married! Rafaelo was asking her to marry him. She had never thought of marriage. She had never thought he would want to marry. A married Rafaelo seemed incongruous.

She tried to laugh it off. "Rafaelo, I can't imagine you married and settled down. What would your people say of you—what about the girls who buy your pictures? No, no, boy. I'd spoil you for them."

"I do not care, Eleanor. I must marry you, I must

call you mine. I want you. I always get what I want, and I will have you."

He drew her to him. "Do you not love me, querida mía?" he asked softly.

She was quiet as she nestled close to him, his arm around her, her head against his shoulder. Yes, she did love him. She had to admit it—she loved him. This dark, passionate man represented to her all that she had missed in life. As Mildred said, he stood for Passion and Romance, a thing that every woman craves some time in her life, whether she will admit it or not. Even the placid mother sitting by her fireside putting a new wrist-band to husband's old shirt, has her secret dreams of a wonderful mad love, of a wonderful lover who will take her madly in his arms and call her his beloved, his beautiful, the star of his life. Husbands don't do those things. They are more apt to say: "This steak isn't done enough. You ought to fire Jenny."

Rafaelo was the fulfilment of all those dreams. He was the lover come to life with whom she had thrilled in the novels, which had been her only reading. He was the romantic actor with whom she had wept in the love scenes of a play. He was the movie hero who of late years had been her idol. To any woman of Eleanor's character, or lack of it, love for Rafaelo was an assured fact as soon as he became interested in her. But to marry him?

She was quiet. Rafaelo bent his head to her and

his lips touched her forehead, her eyes, and finally her lips. "Do you not love me, querida mía?"

She looked up into the black eyes bent searchingly on her face.

"Oh, Rafaelo, you know I do," she whispered.

"Then why not marry me?"

"I cannot," she said.

"You cannot? Why not?" he asked.

"Because—because——" She could not finish.

He drew back from her. "If you cannot marry me, then you will live with me. You will be mine, Eleanor. The marriage makes little difference to me, but I thought it would please you. I do not ask every woman to marry me."

Eleanor was frightened. He was insulted. He felt he was giving her great honor by asking her to marry him. And she appreciated it. He was a very popular man. There were many women who would feel honored to be less than his wife, and rumor had said that there were many who had had that doubtful honor. But he wanted to *marry* her.

He drew her to him again. "Ah, querida, can you not see the wonderful life we will have? Rafaelo and Eleanor. We will work together, we will build us a home here in these mountains one of the days when our time is past—that will be many years from now—and we will be so happy. I love you, querida—why, I do not know. It is not for your brains; you have none," he said with frankness. "But I love you, and for the first time in my life I want to marry. We

will go to the padre tomorrow, dear one, and we will marry."

Eleanor sat up.

"But, Rafaelo, Rafaelo, I cannot."

"You cannot? You say that like a parrot. Why can you not?" he asked in a voice that Eleanor recognized as the beginning of one of his tempers. "I am tired of this 'I cannot.' Tell me what you mean."

Eleanor said without any emotion in her voice:

"I am married, Rafaelo."

Rafaelo said nothing. He stared at her.

"What is that you say?"

"I am married," Eleanor repeated. "I told you that—you knew it."

Rafaelo took her by the shoulders. "You are married—you are married? You are not married! I will not believe it. What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. You knew it. You were with Mildred and me when we sent a telegram to my husband."

"Bah—I had forgotten that. You have deceived me. You have made me love you."

"I have not deceived you, Rafaelo. You knew I was married."

"I knew, yes. Perhaps. But you have been with me all these months; you do not speak of a husband. You let me tell you I love you, you tell me you love me. I forget that one day you say you are married. Where is this husband?"

"He is back home."

"Why did you not tell me more of this husband? Why did you not say, 'Rafaelo, I cannot love you. You cannot love me. I am married.'"

"I thought—I thought——"

"You thought you would make a fool of me, of Rafaelo Cortez. You thought you would make me love you and then laugh at me!"

"No, no, Rafaelo; I did not think at all. I did not think we would love each other. I never intended to love you—I did not know you would love me."

"You saw I loved you. Why did you not tell me?"

"I did tell you, Rafaelo."

"You never talk of your home, you never talk of this husband you just now remember."

"I—I—was afraid I would lose you. I could not talk of my husband when I began to love you, when I saw you loving me. I was afraid."

Rafaelo's actor spirit was coming to the surface. He instinctively began to dramatize the situation. He stopped the car.

"I cannot talk in here. I must get out. Come with me."

Eleanor was practically drawn from the car. Rafaelo looked around. They were in a wooded glade, a very beautiful spot. The moonlight crept through the branches of the great trees, casting quivering shadows on the ground. If Rafaelo had chosen the place for a dramatic love scene, he could not have chosen better. He led Eleanor to a fallen tree.

"Sit there. I want to talk with you. I do not understand you at all. I will understand you now."

He folded his arms and stood in front of her.

"Now tell me what you mean when you say you are married."

"Rafaelo, I have told you. My husband is at home waiting for me."

"Waiting for you? You expect to go back to him?"

"Certainly, I expect to go back to him," Eleanor said.

"You count without me, without Rafaelo Cortez," he said dramatically.

"But, Rafaelo, you knew it. I told you. You heard Mildred and me talk it over."

"Yes, I hear once you two talk of sending for some husband. Then I never hear again—I forget. It did not register. I think, if I think at all, that you have leave him."

He was quiet for a time, walking up and down in front of her.

Eleanor said timidly, putting her hand on his arm as he passed:

"But what can I do, Rafaelo? What can you do? We can do nothing."

"I will kill him," ranted Rafaelo, like an actor in a melodrama.

Eleanor smiled. "That is not done by the best families now, Rafaelo."

"No, but it will be done by me," he said tragically.

Eleanor laughed.

"Ah, you laugh. If I do not kill him, I will kill myself. Yes, that is better, I will kill myself."

Eleanor started to get up.

"Don't be foolish, Rafaelo. Of course you will not do either."

Rafaelo pushed her back on the log. He strode up and down on the grass-plot in front of her. He was in his element. He was the center of a stage melodrama and he instinctively was going to make the best of it.

"You perfidious woman, you lying woman, you have deceived me. You have taken my heart and torn it to pieces in my breast." And he beat the aforesaid breast. Mildred would have laughed at him, but Eleanor was in love with him and could only see him with love's eyes. He loved a woman and she was married. That, to Eleanor, was real tragedy.

She watched him as he strode up and down before her. She could do nothing, she could say nothing. Finally he came to a halt before her.

"Querida, do you love this man?"

Eleanor hesitated before she answered. Then she said softly: "I did—before I met you."

"Do you love him now, I ask."

"No——"

"You love me?"

"Yes—I love you."

He came and sat down beside her and put his arms around her, drawing her head to his breast. His voice became the caressing voice she loved.

"Ah, queridísima, then we will be happy. You love me, I love you. We will be the same as married."

Eleanor drew herself away.

"I will not, Rafaelo. I will not. You have understood all the time—I have told you many times that——"

Rafaelo drew her to him again.

"But what can we do? I love you. I cannot live without you. I will kill myself if I cannot have you. Life—what is it without you, my querida? Pouf—it is nothing. I will rather die."

Eleanor caressed his face, the dark, passionate face that fascinated her.

"We can do nothing, Rafaelo. I must go home."

"You must go to another man? I will not have it, I cannot have it. You are mine. I love you so, querida mía. I love you so much."

At the sound of his voice, the sadness in his tones, the tears came to Eleanor's eyes. She felt, for the first time, that she could not live without this love—without this wonderful lover.

She drew his face to hers and kissed his eyes.

"Rafaelo, I love you—I love you——" she murmured, "but—but——"

Rafaelo suddenly sat up and pushed Eleanor from him.

"I have it, Eleanor. You do not love this man; he is not your husband if you do not love him. He has no right to you. You will divorce him. What is marriage anyway—or a husband—pouf——" and he threw

out his hands as if to wipe out of existence all marriages and husbands. "You will divorce him."

Eleanor was shocked and showed it. She stood up.

"Rafaelo, what do you say? I cannot divorce Tom. He has done nothing."

Rafaelo also stood up facing her.

"Tom—Tom," he repeated with his queer foreign accent. "Tom—that is his name. Common name. Done nothing? He has done everything. He has married you and you are mine. You will divorce him."

"But, Rafaelo, I can't. He has done nothing. He has always been good to me. I cannot divorce him."

"He does not need to do anything. We are in Mexico; you can divorce him here. It is easy."

"But, Rafaelo, I do not want to divorce him."

"Ah," and Rafaelo turned on her. "You love this man, this Tom. You do not love me."

"I do, I do love you—but, Rafaelo——"

Rafaelo came close to her and his face was tragic, so Eleanor thought, in the moonlight.

"You cannot love two men. Is it this man or me, Rafaelo?"

Eleanor said simply:

"I have told you, Rafaelo, that I love you."

"Then you will come with me. You will divorce him?"

Eleanor's lips quivered and the tears came to her eyes. Rafaelo came to her and took her in his arms.

"Look at me, querida. Look at me. I love you,

I love you. You love me. Can you go back to a man you do not love?"

"But, Rafaelo, how can I divorce Tom who has always been so good to me? It would break his heart."

"You would not break his heart, and you would break my heart, and if what you say is true, your heart. Is not two lives more than one life?"

Eleanor did not answer. Rafaelo caressed her face and her hair with his lips, then finally said:

"We will say not more tonight, queridísima. Tomorrow we will think it over more calmly, and you will think of what I have said, and you will come to me."

They sat a while in silence, then Rafaelo said: "We will go home now; tomorrow I will come to you."

CHAPTER XIX

ALONE in her room that night, away from the personality of Rafaelo, which seemed to dominate her completely when she was with him, Eleanor passed through enough emotional stages to last her for a lifetime. At first she thought only of Rafaelo, his love, her love for him, his sorrow that seemed so very real. She was still under the influence of his tenderness as they drove home silently, her hand in his, her head on his shoulder, the little murmurs of endearment as he touched her face, her hair, from time to time with his lips.

Then she thought of Tom. Her feeling for him was purely maternal. She did not want to hurt him. Yet she felt she could not go back to him and never see Rafaelo again. A divorce. She could not get a divorce. She thought of Peggy and Beth. Their shame—the old friends—then her thoughts would come back to Tom again. She walked restlessly around the room. She could not lie down, she could not sit down. She must decide. She would decide. She would give up Rafaelo. She would go home. At last in a passion of tears she threw herself on the bed, and towards morning she fell asleep.

She slept late the next morning and when finally she awakened, she had a heavy feeling, an oppression that seemed to weigh her down. At first she did not re-

member the cause of this sorrow that was like a leaden thing around her heart. As she lay looking at the ceiling, she remembered. Rafaelo had asked her to divorce Tom. She must either do as he wished or give up her lover. She could not contemplate the idea of divorce without a slight shudder, although the shudder was not as strong as it would have been six months before. She had been brought up to think of divorce as a great disgrace. Few people with whom she associated were divorced. The word, "She is a divorced woman," meant that she was a woman to be avoided, she was declassé. She considered herself a modern woman, and knew that divorce was not looked upon as it had been in girlhood, but still with her and with the set who were her friends, a divorced woman was not a popular woman. But for six months she had been constantly with people who considered divorce as part of the day's work. The marriage tie was not considered sacred, nor necessarily binding. She met women every day who had been divorced not only once but several times. The word carried no stigma, and there were many happy marriages where both the husband and wife thoroughly believed and acted upon the axiom that change ruled the world, and it should also rule the marriage state.

When she was turning over the question in her tired mind, the phone rang, and Rafaelo was announced. She told him to come to her sitting-room. She rose slowly, tired in body as well as mind, and put on a kimono. When she joined Rafaelo in her tiny sitting-

room, he appeared radiant. He came to her and took her in his arms and kissed her. Then he held her back and looked at her.

"You are tired, querida. You have the dark looks around your dear eyes," and he kissed the eyes. "You have not had your coffee. Ah, we will have the coffee, then you will feel better." He went to the telephone and ordered coffee and rolls. Eleanor went to an easy-chair and sank into it, every line of her body expressing discouragement. Rafaelo roamed up and down the room, picking up a book and putting it down, taking a long-stemmed rose from a vase and using it as a whip around his legs and on the tables as he passed. One could see that he was excited.

"I have so much to say to you—I have such a great plan—I have been out all morning with my friends, I have seen the Mayor—but I will not talk with you until you have your coffee. Then you will listen, you will hear my wonderful plan, and you will agree with me, querida mía—you will see with my eyes, and——" He talked on excitedly, never stopping his walk around the room except from time to time to rest a moment behind Eleanor, to touch her hair, or to put his hand caressingly against her cheek.

Finally the coffee was brought. He helped the waiter bring up a small table and he poured the coffee, being careful about the cream and sugar.

"You—you are an American, you like to spoil your coffee with cream. It is detestable, but you shall have it—just the right color, like a well-polished tan

shoe. And sugar, she will not think of those dreadful things, calories, this morning; we will make it sweet, we will take away the bitteer—like life, always Rafaelo will take away the bitteer from Eleanor, she will have nothing but the sweet things in life that Rafaelo will give her. Now drink it, querida mía, and eat this nice fresh roll, with butter—yes, you will take butter this morning, because it is a fiesta day, and on days of fiesta we do not think of what we shall eat and drink; we enjoy it all."

Eleanor drank the coffee and ate the roll. Then when she had finished and refused the second cup of coffee, Rafaelo poured himself a cup of the strong black coffee and drank it.

"Ah, that is good. You will feel better. Coffee is like a cocktail: it—what is it that you Americans say? —it bucks you up."

He took the table and placed it at one side of the room, then he brought up a low stool and sat in front of Eleanor, holding her two hands in his. He drew her face to him: "Let me kiss you first, on your mouth, which is again soft and warm, on your eyes from which the tired look is passing, and we will talk. I have so much to say, and you must listen and not stop me. You must not say: 'No, no, Rafaelo,' until I am feenished. Then you will say: 'Yes, yes, Rafaelo,' and we will be happy and we will laugh again."

Eleanor smiled down at the dark eyes, at the eager face, and said: "What is it, Rafaelo?"

"Ah, now you smile. I will tell you. I have been

to my friends, and my friend the Mayor. I have asked about the laws of this Province, and I have learned the news that has made my heart sing. We can get the divorce here, in this town, and it can be gotten immediately. We have been here on location, you are a resident long enough, and everything can be done quickly."

Eleanor drew her hands away from those of Rafaelo.

"But, Rafaelo, I told you I would not get a divorce. There is no reason for a divorce."

"That is what is so good in this charming country. There does not need to be a reason. You do not wish to live with a man. Why should you? The law here will say that you need not."

"But—but—what about my husband? He may object. He may not want to give me a divorce."

"That is another one of the charming laws of this beautiful country. He does not need to know. He will not be informed."

"But he must know, Rafaelo," said Eleanor.

"Why should he know? It is none of his business," answered Rafaelo angrily. Eleanor's eyes opened and she looked at Rafaelo as if she had not heard him right.

"Rafaelo, how can you talk that way? Of course it is his business," said Eleanor.

"I tell you it is none of his business," said Rafaelo obstinately.

"Why, Rafaelo, how can it not be his business? He is my husband and—he—loves me——"

Rafaelo interrupted Eleanor. He threw his head up and his hands out in his characteristic Latin manner.

"Your husband—pouf," he said scornfully. "What is that! Loves you!—What is his love—the love of a merchant, a common man—compared to mine—the love of Rafaelo Cortez—" Again he tossed his head in disdain. "But we will not speak of it. Querida mia—but we must hurry, as the Mayor told me that many objections had been made by foolish people in the United States, and they will soon change the law so that the person asking for freedom will have to remain three months, and that the other person—what is it he is called? Ah, the defendant—will have to be notified. It is only because of some foolish ideas of the Americans that this law, which is bringing so much needed money to the Province, must be changed, but now it is the old law and we will profit by it. No one will know. It can be done so quietly, only the Mexican papers will publish the news, and no one in the United States reads the Mexican papers—so—so—there you are." He blew a kiss from the tips of his fingers into the air and turned to Eleanor with a triumphant expression.

"But, Rafaelo——"

"Ah, I will not, no buts. I will not hear you. I am determined upon this thing. It will be done—I will not listen to you." And he put his hands to his ears and laid his head in Eleanor's lap. He was so like a bad boy that Eleanor could not help but smile as she ran her fingers through his hair. But she tried to tell him that the whole thing was impossible. She

talked quietly of her home, her husband, she did not mention children; but she made no impression upon Rafaelo. He would stop her mouth with his hand, or he would bring her face to his and kiss the lips that were trying to tell him that she must leave him.

Two hours passed, and finally Rafaelo rose. "It is decided, then. It will be done soon, this week. I will see that my friends make special haste."

Eleanor tried again to remonstrate, but Rafaelo would not listen to her. Instead, he took her in his arms and kissed her good-by, saying he would return after all arrangements were completed.

Eleanor went around for the next few days in a daze. She was never alone, she was always with Rafaelo or some of his friends. Every night there was a party given by some member of the company, and Eleanor did not come home until tired and sleepy, too tired to think. The next day was spent in work, and any time between being actually at work on the picture, she was with Rafaelo, who was in fine spirits and exerted all of his charm.

If Mildred had been with her, Mildred with her clear common sense, the end of the story would have been very different. There would never have been a divorce. But Eleanor was thrown entirely upon her own resources; she had to make her decisions for herself, always with Rafaelo near her to dominate her with the irresistible charm he had for her.

The divorce was granted. Eleanor was given a paper telling her in Spanish that she was a free wo-

man—according to the laws of Mexico. Rafaelo was wildly excited. He danced around her sitting-room, he sang little snatches of songs in a very bad voice, he caught her up to him and whirled her madly around the room, he was like a boy out of school. But Eleanor—when she looked down at the paper that told her that she was no longer Tom's wife, kind, patient Tom, she had a lost feeling, that she was alone on a great river that was bearing her downward. She would have given anything to have undone it. She felt that she could never be the same Eleanor again, that the load that seemed to be weighing so heavily in her breast would never lighten. She could not join with Rafaelo in his merry-making, and when she tried to smile, it was a sorry smile that she gave him. Her sadness vexed Rafaelo. He could not understand it.

"Why not laugh with me, querida? You are free—we have life before us and it will be one song. You will forget the past, forget all but Rafaelo."

But Eleanor could not laugh, could not join him in his gaiety.

"Ah, I have a thought," he said. "Tomorrow night we will have a party, a grand party. We will ask the whole company. I will ask my friends, the Mayor and his friends, and the Padre and we will tell them all that we are to be married. We will announce grandly that as soon as the laws allow, I do not know if we must wait, we will be One."

Filled with this new idea of the party, he left to make arrangements for the festivities.

Eleanor passed a very unhappy, sleepless night. She thought of Tom, of Peggy and Beth, whom perhaps she would never see again. She said over and over again: "Why did I do it?"

She was really ill the next day, and passed the day in bed. She would not see Rafaelo, who frantically called at least once an hour. About six o'clock he told her over the phone that she must make ready for the party. "It will be some party, querida mía. We have all the company, all of my friends, all of the friends of my friends—it will be a fiesta that will long be remembered. You must put on your most handsome dress, you must look more beautiful than ever, so that all of my friends will envy me. The hotel will serve the supper; I have much champagne and one of my friends has sent me old wine, wine that has been in his family for many years. We will celebrate—ah, how we will celebrate! I will come for you at eight o'clock."

Eleanor replied simply that she would be ready, then she lay down on the bed. How could she carry through this farce? She rose slowly and dressed. About seven o'clock there was a knock at the door and a servant appeared with a telegram. It had been forwarded from Hollywood. She opened it and read:

"Grandmother. Come and see your grandson. Peg."

Eleanor sat down suddenly in a chair. She read the telegram again. Then the tears came. They came faster and faster and dropped down on the slip of

paper in her hand. Her grandson! Peggy had a baby! She forgot everything, but the fact that Peggy, her Peggy, had a baby! She forgot Rafaelo, the waiting company, everything. She could see the farmhouse, could see Peg lying in bed with her son in her arms. She imagined she could see Jim bending over the bed, could see Tom and Beth. Could see them turn their heads as if looking for her.

They would all be there, all come to see this new little, wonderful life that had come to live with them. They would all be there except Eleanor, the one who should have been there first. Peggy should have had her mother at the birth of her first son. And she was here, in Mexico, with a movie picture company. There was a crowd of people downstairs, actors, actresses, directors, Mexicans—not her kind of people at all. They were waiting for her to come and join in the merriment, in the merriment that would celebrate her divorce from Tom, and that would announce her engagement to a movie actor, a Mexican movie actor. What would they think if they knew that she was not a young woman, if they knew that she was a grandmother? Then in imagination she saw the headlines in the newspapers, "Nell Gwyn, the beautiful movie actress, is a grandmother." What would these young people say with whom she had worked and played these last four months? They never realized how hard it had been to play at times, how difficult it was to force the tired old body to play the part of youth, to live up to the youthful face and figure.

The phone rang. Rafaelo's voice, a little confused, said: "Are you ready, Eleanor? I am coming up." She did not reply. He impatiently said again: "I am coming up, Eleanor. We have had some of the cocktails, and they are good. We are waiting for you. They will be gone if you do not come."

She tried to answer in her ordinary tone of voice. "Wait ten minutes, Rafaelo, and I will come down." She rang off, not waiting for the argument that she feared might come from Rafaelo, especially if he had been indulging in cocktails, a drink that was foreign to him and to which he easily succumbed.

Eleanor did not hesitate. She rapidly took off her evening dress and put on a street suit. She changed her stockings—thin, silk stockings and silver slippers—to walking shoes. She found a bag and hastily filled it with some clothing from the closet. Then she counted her money. She had two hundred dollars, but nearly fifteen hundred in the bank at Hollywood. She called up the office of the hotel and asked what time the night train left for the North. She was told nine-thirty. She put on her hat and found her gloves, and taking the bag started for the door. As she was part way across the room, the door opened and Rafaelo came in. They both stopped as they saw each other. He looked at her.

"What are you doing? Why are you not dressed? I have come for you." Rafaelo's face was flushed. He had evidently been drinking. Yet even then, Eleanor subconsciously admired him. The flush was be-

coming to his dark face, and the dark eyes looked darker with excitement.

He came towards her. "What are you doing, I say? Why are you not dressed?"

Eleanor said simply:

"I am not going with you, Rafaelo. I am going home."

"What!" he said, as if he could not understand her.

"I am going home," she repeated.

"Home, to what home? What do you mean?"

"I am going home to my home and my husband—and my children."

"But you have no husband—you have no children."

"I may not have a husband, but I have children, and I am going home to them," she said obstinately.

Rafaelo came to her and took her by the shoulders, his flushed face close to hers. "What do you mean, Eleanor? I cannot understand you."

Eleanor placed the bag on a chair. "Rafaelo, I have deceived you—I have never told you about my children. I have two children."

"You have two children? Where are they?"

"They are in their homes."

"You mean in your home, back there with the man who was your husband?"

"No; I mean that they are in their own homes. They are both married."

Rafaelo let go of her shoulders and stepped back. He was silent as he looked at her. "You—you have married children?"

"Yes, I have two daughters who are married, and now—now—read this telegram." She took the paper from the table and handed it to him. He read it once, twice, then read it again. "I do not understand it. What does it say?"

"It says that my elder daughter has a son and—and—that I am a grandmother." She tried to laugh, but it was only a smile that twisted her lips.

Rafaelo stepped back. "You—you—a grandmother?"

"Yes, I am a grandmother."

He was silent for a few moments, then he came towards her. "You are laughing at me, Eleanor mía. How could you be a grandmother? You are hardly more than a girl."

Eleanor went to him and taking him by the arm said: "Rafaelo, I have deceived you in many things. I am no young girl. I am forty-eight years old."

Rafaelo only stared at her. Then he said: "It ees impossible, Eleanor. You are twenty-five years old. That is what you told me, what Jim Gorman told me, what Mildred told me."

Eleanor smiled. "Yes, that is what I am told to say, but it is not the truth. I am forty-eight years old."

"How—how—can it be possible? You look young, you are young. How can a woman look twenty-five years old when she is forty-eight, an old woman? When one is forty-eight, one is old . . . . old. A woman has no more life to live; she has wrinkles, she has

a hideous neck—she is disgusting. How can you be forty-eight?"

"But I *am,* Rafaelo. You know Mildred; she is fifty-two. I—I—had the same thing done to me that Mildred has had done."

"What could you have done?"

"I—I—had a doctor do some things and he made me young again—made me look young—as you see me now."

Rafaelo stared at her.

"But I do not believe it! I could not love a woman who was forty-eight years old. Horrible! That is older than my mother—she is only forty-one."

"But it is true, Rafaelo," said Eleanor quietly.

Rafaelo came to her and took her again by the shoulders and stared into her face. "You have lied to me—to me?"

"Yes—I——"

Rafaelo threw her from him so violently that she almost fell.

"I hate you—I hate you! An old woman! A grandmother—and you deceived me. Me—Rafaelo Cortez. Get away—you make me seek! An old woman—a woman of forty-eight who is fit for nothing but to die!" All the scorn the Latin feels for a woman who, to him, has no sex lure, was in his voice. "An old woman! Me to love an old woman? I hate old women—they make me seek, I tell you!"

He came towards her; his face was livid, his eyes blazed. Eleanor instinctively crouched. She thought

he was going to strike her. She was afraid of him. This was not the Rafaelo she had known, with the caressing voice, the melting, languorous eyes, the charming lips that called her "querida." His voice snarled, his mouth was twisted into a hideous shape. She gazed at him fascinated, as one would be at a raging animal.

"I hate you, I tell you!" And he brought his face close to hers. "I hate you!" Then he started around the room. He picked up a vase and threw it on the floor; he kicked over a chair; he threw his hands up over his head; he took his hair and pulled it like an angry child. All the time he was talking, partly in Spanish and partly in English. In his anger his accent was more noticeable. His words came so fast that Eleanor could scarcely understand him.

"What will they say of me, of me, Rafaelo Cortez? That I have been laughed at, that I have been a great damn fool—by a woman! Me, who can have all women, who all women love when they see me? What will they say when I come downstairs and say: 'She, the woman I am to marry, is an old woman, a grandmother!'"

Eleanor flushed and her eyes flashed. She, too, was angry.

"You need tell them nothing except that we are not to marry."

"What will they think—that you have jeelted me—me—Rafaelo Cortez?" He struck his breast dramatically.

Eleanor laughed.

He heard the laugh and he stopped. Then he came to her. "Ah—you can laugh. I will make you laugh, yes, another kind of a laugh." He drew back his hand and deliberately struck her across the mouth.

Eleanor was stunned for the moment. She drew her hand across her mouth, then she reached for her bag. She flew to the door and opened it.

"You dirty, Mexican dog!" she hissed in a voice that was almost too low for him to hear. She was surprised that she could feel the hate in her heart that she felt towards this man who had struck her.

Rafaelo started for her, but before he could reach her she had gone through the door, and in going had taken the key with her. She slammed the door and turned the key in it. Then she went downstairs, and found a sleepy cab-driver at the door. "Take me to the station, quick. *Estación, presto—presto!*" She hoped she was speaking Spanish, but whatever it was the man understood her and started for the station.

CHAPTER XX

ELEANOR went to Hollywood, where she drew her money from the bank, then she started for New York. That trip was a dream, or more nearly a nightmare. She went over and over again the past months. She tried to figure out why she had made so many mistakes, what could have possessed her to have done as she had done. When she thought of Rafaelo, she shuddered. Supposing she had really married him.

Eleanor was not a reasoning woman; self-analysis was not her forte. Finally she gave up the attempt to think it all out, and she simply suffered.

When she arirved in New York, her only thought was to get to Mildred. She felt instinctively that clear-headed, clear-thinking Mildred would in some way help her solve her problems.

Mildred answered the doorbell. She had a cloth around her head and was dressed in a blue and white bungalow apron. She stared at Eleanor. Eleanor said with a sob in her voice:

"Oh, Mildred, let me come in!"

Mildred stepped back and Eleanor went past here into the room. All of the furniture was piled in the middle of the room, and a vacuum cleaner had evidently been left when the bell rang.

Mildred drew a chair from out the pile, and said:

"In the name of the Prophet, what you doing here? Sit down. I thought you were in Mexico."

Eleanor put her bag on a vacant chair and sat down. She looked up at Mildred and her face worked pitifully, although no tears came. "I'm in trouble, Mildred."

Mildred looked at her, then she started for the kitchen.

"You certainly look all in. Have a drink. I'll fix one up. There are times when a drink's the only thing. Wait a minute."

She was gone for a short time, then returned with a bottle and two glasses. She poured a generous drink, "Swallow this down—down—no, don't choke—swallow it down."

Eleanor drank. Mildred looked at her closely for a moment, then she poured herself a drink, and looked around for a chair. "I'll take one to keep you company, and—I think I'll need a bracer if signs don't fail."

She could not find an empty chair and went into another room, bringing a dining-room chair with her. "I'm house-cleaning. Haven't got a girl. Found the house so dirty that I fired her. Jack never pays any attention when I'm gone, and when I get back the house looks like a pig-pen. I didn't have a chance to do anything, as I went right to work, but I'm out of a job now and am going to clean up or we'll be arrested as a menace to our neighbors."

She placed the chair opposite Eleanor. Then went

behind her and took off her hat. She sat down. "Now spill it. What's the grand occurrence?"

Eleanor started to cry. "Oh, Mildred, Peg has a baby!"

Mildred stared at her. "Well, isn't that natural? Most married women have babies if they don't go in for birth control. Why the tears?"

"But I should have been with her!"

"Sure you should have, but you wasn't. That can be remedied. She'll live until you get to her."

"But, Mildred, can I go home? I can't go home."

"Why can't you go home? The Pennsylvania Railroad still takes passengers."

"You don't understand, Mildred."

"Perhaps I can't just follow you, but evidently you have decided that the old home town and the fireside is going to look good to you. Fine idea! I told you that you'd come to it. Am mighty glad. When you going?"

Eleanor looked at Mildred, and at the look Mildred stopped the smile that was in her eyes.

"What's the big idea, Eleanor? Spill it. What you got inside of you?"

"I can't go home, Mildred, I can't. And I must—I must go home."

"Aren't you a little mixed up? If you must go home, why can't you? They'll all be tickled to death to see you. And, say, by the way, what's the new kid?"

"It's a boy."

"Ain't that fine? Every one wants a boy first. Jack nearly died when our first was a boy, he was so tickled. He wanted another, but kind of got used to girls after the third."

Eleanor said nothing.

"Well, well," said Mildred. "It's a good start. I suppose fond poppa is on the heights. That wonderful pattern—himself, is not lost to the world—but he'll get used to the sensation—I remember Jack," and she chuckled. "The first child made him proud, the second made him happy, the third made him think he ought to go to work, that's when he tried business and nearly put us up the spout—and the fourth made him desperate. But he's lived through it—so'll Jim. Won't it be fine to see it? You a grandmother. Say, I'll be a grandmother and I think I'll be prouder of being a grandmother than of being a mother, and that's going some. Let's have another drink to celebrate. A grandmother—— Well, I wouldn't want it headlined, but I'd like to feel like a grandmother once—believe I'd get a great kick out of it."

She poured out another drink for herself, and offered the bottle to Eleanor. Eleanor shook her head.

"Say, Eleanor, don't look so mournful. Anybody'd think it was a funeral instead of a birth you are going to celebrate. Here's to the kid," and she drank her glass of gin.

Eleanor sat quietly for a time, then she said: "Mildred, I don't know how I can tell you. I want you to help me. What will I do?"

"What've you done, in the first place?"

"I have divorced Tom," she said simply.

If Eleanor had thrown a bomb at Mildred, she would not have caused more consternation to register on her face. The glass dropped from her hand and was shattered on the floor. Mildred paid no attention to it, but stared at Eleanor.

"You've *what*?" she exclaimed.

"Just what I've said. I've divorced Tom."

"Well, I'll be damned!" was all she could reply. Finally she said: "What did you do that for?"

"I don't know; I must have been mad."

"You sure said a mouthful. When'd you do it?"

"About a week or ten days ago."

"Where'd you get it?"

"In Mexico."

"In Mexico. One of them phoney divorces."

"No, I'm afraid it's all according to law."

"According to Mexican law. But is it good here?"

"Yes, I was told so."

"Who told you so?"

"Rafaelo."

Mildred sat up suddenly.

"That wop! Say, Eleanor, what's he got to do with it?"

"Well—he—he got me the divorce. At least he made all the arrangements."

Mildred studied the face opposite her for a few moments. "Say, Eleanor, are you mixed up with that greaser?"

Eleanor flushed. "Not in the way you mean," she replied.

"Well, you must be or why should he bother about a divorce for you?"

"We were going to be married."

Mildred seemed to choke. The blood rushed to her face, and for a moment Eleanor thought her friend was going to have an epileptic fit. Then Mildred caught her breath and her fluency returned.

"You were going to marry that actor? And you divorced a perfectly good man for him? Say, you must be off your bean! What hit you out there?"

"I don't know—I was just fascinated—I don't know how it happeend—but I divorced Tom, and Rafaelo and I were to be married."

"Well, what stopped you? You ought to have finished the thing, the ending of a happy day, so to speak."

The scorn in Mildred's voice made Eleanor wince.

"Say it all, Mildred. I know I've been a fool—you can't say anything I don't think about myself."

"You damn fool, you. I can't say another thing but just you damn fool."

Eleanor said nothing. The tears came to her eyes, and she sank in her chair.

"Oh, Mildred, I am so unhappy!" she moaned.

Mildred looked at her with not too much sympathy in her blue eyes. After a time she said: "Well, you ought to be." She was quiet, looking at the sobbing woman.

"What stopped this charming marriage?"

"I—I got that telegram from Peg—and it made me think—and it made me think——" she repeated.

"Oh, it made you think. Well, your thinker had evidently had some rest, and needed a jolt to start it working again. Why should the telegram start the works?"

"I—I—thought of Peg with her baby, and Beth and Tom with her and I couldn't go—and I began to see what I had done—I wanted to see Peg and the baby——"

"So, you got maternal. The doctors could make over your face and diet your figure, but you couldn't hire any one to make over your inside. You found you were a woman, after all; your heart was the same old heart. Well, I'm glad they left some of the old stuff in you. Science and doctors can take us apart and put us together again, but it can't take that something out that the good God gave us, and that's love for our kids. There's a spark of something there that they can't reach. Thank God!"

Eleanor cried softly. Mildred was quiet, then she said:

"What you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"How did Tom take the divorce?" Mildred asked.

"Tom doesn't know it."

"He don't know it? How can you get a divorce without letting him know? Don't they serve papers or something?"

"Not in Mexico—at least in the Province where I got mine."

"What a rotten deal!" said Mildred, with all the scorn she felt in her voice.

"Yes, it was. Say it. I know it. You can't make me feel worse than I do now."

"Did you really want to marry that greaser, Eleanor?"

"I thought I did."

"And he wanted to marry you?"

"Yes."

"He must 'a' been off his nut, too. Why should he want to *marry* you? I can understand him wanting to live with you, but to *marry* you—you got me."

"I—I don't know why myself. I always wondered why he wanted me; he could have any woman he wanted."

"So *you* think. I know one he couldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. I suppose you felt flattered to think that he had chosen you from all the world. Hell!"

Eleanor took her handkerchief from her eyes and looked at Mildred.

"You know he was popular, Mildred. Women were crazy about him."

"Yes, in his pictures. I can see that. But who wants one of them seal-hair lounge lizards around the house?"

Eleanor did not reply.

"Tell me the truth, Eleanor. Were you mixed up with him?"

"I've told you the truth. I was not," said Eleanor sharply.

"Well, I'll believe you although I don't see how you got by."

She was again quiet for a time, evidently studying the perplexing problem.

"I suppose that is why he wanted to marry you. You gave him a kick by not falling for him and it hurt his pride. He really intended to marry you?"

"Yes, and he had asked all the company and his Mexican friends to a party the night I left, to announce the engagement."

"He did. Well, I suppose he meant it, then. But I suppose being a Mex himself he wasn't afraid of marriage. He could get a divorce easy—seemed to know a lot about Mexican divorces, didn't he?"

"He seemed to know about the laws there."

"Perhaps he's had a few and another one wouldn't hurt him. No one knows a thing about that Rafaelo of yours. He may have a few wives lying around idle, as it is."

Eleanor sat up. "What an idea, Mildred! He wouldn't want to marry me if he was married."

"Wouldn't he? I wouldn't trust him around the corner with the cat."

Eleanor rose. "But this is not helping me any. What will I do, Mildred? I can't go home. What will I do with my life—what will I do?"

"I don't know. You've made a mess of it, if you want to hear the truth. I don't see that you can do

a thing. You seem to me to be a grass widow; you ain't married to Tom and you ain't married to Rafaelo. You sort of seem free, if you was to ask me."

"But, Mildred, can't I ever go home?"

"You ain't got a home, if the Mex law holds good."

Eleanor came back to her chair and threw herself into it, her entire attitude expressing complete discouragement.

"Oh, what have I done!" she moaned. "Why did I do it? I've made a wreck of my life—and why?"

"Yes, you've made a wreck of your life, and not only yours. Think of some one else besides yourself, for once. How about Tom? You've sort of mussed up his life, haven't you? And the girls. They're going to be proud of their mother, ain't they? In a little town where everybody finds out everybody's business sometime or other. You've stirred up a nice puddle, it seems to me. And why? Well, I'll tell you why. Pure vanity. You wanted a new face and you go it. You wanted to keep on being pretty; you wanted to keep young; you wanted men to fall for you; you wanted a lot of young men around you. You weren't satisfied with just friends who liked you for what you were, not for what you looked like. Oh, you women make me sick!"

Eleanor flushed again.

"But you did the same, Mildred."

"Yes, I did the same and I'd do it over again. Will have to in a couple of years. But it's my living and Jack's and the kids'. I didn't do it just out of vanity.

I draw down five hundred dollars a week when I'm working instead of one hundred. My face and my figure is my fortune in every sense. It's a business proposition with me and always has been. Do you suppose, if I could make my living being comfortable or having some man keep me, that I'd make a slave of myself as I have to with this new face and figure? Do you suppose that I'd not rather have a nice home and my kids with me all the time than go careering all over this United States, living in hotels and being yelled at through a megaphone by some smart-alec director, and having some putty-faced actor pawing me? No, I ain't stuck on my job, except as a good job and a meal-ticket for the family. It's the only thing I know how to do, and it's my business to draw down as much of the green kale as I can, and if a new face and hennaed hair can do it, me for the face. But you—you had a good home, a man who was willing and able to support you—what'd you want to change your face for? Vanity."

Eleanor stared at Mildred.

"Why, Mildred, you were the one that encouraged me to try it."

"Yes, God forgive me, I did. But, believe me, I've learned my lesson. I can see a woman whose face looks like King Tut's and I'll say, 'Mother, keep that family face. It's evidently brought you good luck so far, and may last until the end, although it don't look it. Stay at home and smile and Papa won't see the wrinkles.' No more advice from Mildred Lee."

"You advised me to go into the movies. I would never have thought of it, if you hadn't persuaded me."

"Right, sister. Right again. I got another regret to remember when I say my prayers. Just the influence of training and environment. I don't know anything but the movies, and I forget that women don't have to work, and when I saw how Sherman had turned you out, I thought of the only thing I know. Rent your looks out at so much per. I knew you looked twenty-five, but you ought to have forty-eight sense."

"That was what Rafaelo said."

"Rafaelo said you ought to have forty-eight sense? No, he didn't. He hasn't any himself, except in his line. By the way, how did he take it? What did you tell him?"

"I told him I was forty-eight and that I had two children and showed him the telegram."

"It must have been some jolt. What'd he do?"

Eleanor was quiet and did not answer.

"Did he give you one of his scenes, an explosion of the artistic temperament?"

"Yes," answered Eleanor quietly.

Mildred waited for her to say more, but as she evidently did not want to talk about the scene, Mildred's curiosity became aroused.

"What'd he do, Eleanor? I'd have liked to have seen him. He sure can tear around some—I've seen him a couple of times when he'd ought to have been

hit over the head with a meat-ax. Go on, give me the synopsis of the latest melodrama."

"Well, he stormed, and he called me names, and—and he raved around the room——"

"Well, you must see his side, too. There's something to be said for him, even though I don't like to. You did put it over him. Now, an American might have stood the fact that you were a nice granny, instead of love's young dream. But not a Latin. A woman's finished when she passes the forty-mark—when she passes what he considers the 'desirable' age. You can't blame him if he yelled a little—anybody'd do it. He considers he's been done, he's a real grievance—well, I can see his side."

"Yes—but—but——"

"Did he stop at yelling and pulling his hair—I've seen him. How'd he finish—what was the curtain?"

Eleanor hesitated, then she said: "He struck me."

Mildred was quiet for a moment, then she said in a low voice:

"He struck you. The dirty dog! That's the Mex for you. Sure, he'd strike you. He'd wipe up the earth with you if he had a chance. You'd ought to be damned glad that he showed his charming characteristics before he got you fast. He'd quite likely take his daily dozen by dragging you around by the hair of your head. I know his kind. I've worked with too many foreign actors not to know their little weaknesses. And they don't care for any women except for one thing. There are only three letters that

spell woman for them, and that is s-e-x. You ought to be darned thankful that you're out of it with him. You'd 'a' had a hell of a life after he got tired of you."

Eleanor was quiet.

Finally Mildred said: "How old's Rafaelo?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Twenty-seven, and you're forty-eight. Well, you ought to get callouses on your knees thanking your Creator that you missed out on being tied to him. Think what it would mean trying to keep up, trying to keep young enough to trot with a boy young enough to be your son. Why, you'd be in hell all of the time. Every morning you'd study your face to see if there was a new line. You'd have to keep your figure to keep your man. You'd die with jealousy every time he'd fall for a pretty young face, which would be the natural thing for him to do. And the worry'd make you old, no matter what you did. Then you'd worry that you were worrying, as you could see what it was doing to you—and—and it'd be an endless chain of unhappiness. Yes—you got something to the good out of the mess. You ain't married to him."

The two women were quiet. Finally Mildred chuckled:

"Yes, I can see him. I'll bet he raved. But I don't blame him a lot. Think of his vanity. He's nothing but a bundle of conceit. And to have to go down to that crowd and tell them that he was turned down. Gee—it'd hurt. It's a wonder that he didn't choke the life out of you. Give a Mexican a few drinks

and a grievance, and they go some. Well—let's forget it. You ought to be damned glad that you ain't married to him or that your pieces didn't have to be collected and shipped home in a box."

Mildred rose and went over the mantel and looked at the clock. "Seven o'clock. I got to dress. I promised to go see Martin's new play tonight. Look at this house. Well, it'll have to wait. Jack'll break his neck when he comes in, but I can't help it. Brace up, Eleanor. Come with me to the show."

"Oh, Mildred, I can't."

"Sure you can and you will. What's the use of setting around here and grouching? You'd quite likely get the hump, and jump out of my kitchen window and muss up the court and cause a scandal that'd be hard for me to live down. Some one might say Jack pushed you out, or you had to jump to save your honor. No, you go with me. Have you got an evening dress with you?"

"Yes, I have the one I was to wear at the party."

"Well, put it on. It'll bring back pleasant recollections. Let me fix a path so Jack can find the bedroom."

She placed the chairs around the room and moved a couple of tables against the wall. Then she said:

"Come out in the kitchen, and we'll chew on a little dog-biscuit. I suppose you've gotten out of the habit of eating real food. I have. I only eat real food in my dreams. Sometimes I dream I'm an island surrounded by a sea of pies, and they're all twiddling

fingers on their noses at me, or they're winking at me with blueberry eyes, and I hate to come to."

She drew Eleanor from the chair and led the way to the kitchen, where she prepared food and made a pot of coffee.

"Drink this," she said. "Good and black and strong. It'll buck you up."

Eleanor winced, as that was the same expression Rafaelo had used on that fateful morning when he had persuaded her to consent to the divorce.

When Mildred rose and said: "Now we will dress," she again said: "I can't go, Mildred. I can't."

"Sure, you'll go. You can't sit here alone, and Jack won't be here until ten-thirty. He's out at some meeting of scientists—really believe he's found something in that dye business—so you'll come with me. Sitting watching the show may give me some idea."

Eleanor went up to Mildred and put her hand on her shoulder.

"Mildred, you are so good to me. Oh, I'm so unhappy! I can't ever laugh again. To think, that the twenty-seventh is the twenty-fifth anniversary of our marriage, our silver wedding. If I were home we would have had a party and all of our old friends would be there—and—and—— Oh, Mildred, what *can* I do?"

Mildred patted the hand that rested on her shoulder, then bent forward and kissed the quivering lips.

"Search me, I don't know *now*. But something'll

come. You must never say you're dead until you're nailed down."

She gave Eleanor one of her evening wraps, a taxi was called and they went to the theatre. They sat in a box with the author of the play and his wife, and were visited between the acts by several of the profession who were at the show. Eleanor could not become interested in the play, afterwards she could never recall what it was about; but she smiled mechanically when she was called upon to smile, and no one knew that the beautiful Nell Gwyn was suffering as deeply as a woman of her nature could suffer.

There was a very beautiful wedding scene at the end of the play, and Mildred watched it, seeming absorbed in the scene before her. At the end she took Eleanor by the hand at the back of the box, and whispered excitedly: "I've got an idea, Eleanor, a grand idea."

"What is it?" she whispered back.

"I can't tell you now, but say, it's some idea. Wait till we get home."

The author was giving a supper at one of the leading cabarets, and Eleanor was compelled to go with them, as she could give no excuse for not remaining with the party.

At one o'clock they were preparing to go home, when a party of young people passed the table and Eleanor heard a laugh that she recognized. She turned and saw Beth passing. "Beth!" she exclaimed.

Beth turned and evidently not recognizing her mother, started on.

"Beth!" Eleanor called again.

Beth stopped and searched the table, trying to see who had called her. Then she saw her mother. She came slowly towards the table, leaving her escort standing in the aisle.

"Ninny," she said. "Ninny."

Eleanor laughed a little shakily. "No, Mother, Beth," she said.

Beth came up to the table and looked down at her mother.

"Well—I never—Peg told me—but, Mother, is it really you?"

"Of course, it's me. Don't you know your own mother?"

Beth's eyes were wide with amazement, and she looked at her mother and then at her companions. Beth's face was flushed, her eyes glistened, it was very evident that the girl had been drinking. Eleanor drew her face down to hers and kissed her. Then she turned to Mildred, and tears were in her eyes:

"Mildred, this is my other daughter, Beth—Mrs. Paige."

Mildred shook the hand that Beth extended, then she shot a quick glance at the escort, who was getting impatient.

"I am glad to know you, Beth. I've met your father and Peggy and now I know the family. Is that your husband waiting for you?"

"No," and Beth flushed. "That is just a friend."

"Oh," said Mildred. "Well, won't you send him away and stay with us? We are just going home."

Beth did not reply.

"Where is Fred, Beth?" asked Eleanor.

"Fred's out with a stag at the Algonquin," she replied, and a little glint of anger came to her eyes.

"Where are you going now?" asked Eleanor.

"We're going up to Gerry's apartment, then I'll go to the hotel, I suppose."

"Why don't you come home with us?" said Mildred. "We can stop at your hotel and leave a note for your husband telling him where you are and he can come over in the morning. Your mother and you will have a lot to talk over, and I don't know anywhere women can talk things over so well as they can when creaming their faces."

Beth hesitated. "Oh, I'd better go with the crowd ——"

"No, you'd better come with us," Mildred said emphatically. She motioned to the waiting young man. He came over. Mildred smiled at him.

"We're awfully sorry to have kept you waiting, but Beth has decided to spend the night with her mother. You'll make her excuses to the party, won't you?"

The young man frowned and looked at Beth, who seemed undecided, but Mildred took it for granted that she was coming with them, and she said sweetly, "Good-night" to the young man, who could do nothing but leave. Beth was introduced to the other members

of the party and after a few minutes' chat, taxis were called and they went home.

As Mildred took mother and daughter to their connecting rooms, she whispered to Eleanor, "Tell her nothing," and she left them.

CHAPTER XXI

THE next morning Eleanor came into Mildred's room. Her eyes showed that she had not slept. She sat down in a chair and said nothing, staring straight before her.

Mildred watched her for a moment, then she said: "What's wrong?"

"Did you notice that Beth had been drinking last night?" she asked.

"No one could help noticing it. She had the makings of a fine little jag."

Eleanor said nothing more; finally Mildred said:

"Anything wrong?"

"I don't know. We talked until Beth got sleepy. All I can make out is that Fred and Beth are not getting along very well, and that Beth does not like Fred's mother. They had a quarrel tonight over this stag party, and Beth went out with the crowd, sort of revenge."

"What kind of a man is her husband?"

"He's from one of the best families in our town. His mother is one of the leaders, his father is the leading banker——"

"That's not answering my question. I don't care about his family; what's the man like?"

"Well——" and Eleanor hesitated. "He's always

been rather wild, gone with a sporty set, spends a lot of time in Chicago and New York."

"Was Beth wild?"

"No, she was much quieter than Peg."

"How'd she fall for the sporty kind, then?"

"I don't know, but she did. He sort of fascinated her, I can see now."

"Like mother, like daughter," said Mildred.

Eleanor flushed.

"What'd you let her marry him for if he was no good?" asked Mildred with frankness. Mildred was never subtle. No one ever misunderstood her exact meaning.

"That is one of the things I have been reproaching myself for all night. Just another of my mistakes. I thought of the good marriage, financially and socially —I didn't think of the man. I did, at first—but—but ——"

"But *what*?" demanded Mildred.

"I might as well tell you. When I first got this idea of having my face lifted, I asked Tom if I could have it done, and he said he could not afford it. Then he promised me that if the girls got married, he might think of it. There was no likelihood of either of them being married then, and he promised me easily."

"Sort of stalling you, I see."

"Yes, I presume so. But Peggy was married quietly within a short time, then Beth came to me and told me she was engaged to Fred. At first I was against it, something inside me said 'No,' but—and here you

will despise me, Mildred—I thought of Tom's promise that when the girls were married I could have the operation—and—and—well, I thought more about that when she told me than I did——"

Mildred interrupted.

"You were so anxious to have this operation that you were willing to have your daughter marry anybody, if it would help things along for what you wanted. I see."

Eleanor's eyes flashed a little.

"But she was not making a bad marriage. I've told you that he is the only son of the leading banker and his mother——"

"Yes, I know that. But Beth don't have to live with the banker or the leading social light—she lives with the scion of the family, and if he's no good, what's the difference about his mother and father?"

Eleanor was quiet. After a time, Mildred said:

"Well, it's done, and perhaps it's not as bad as it might be. Nothing is. The girl seems all right; I'll get the boy up here and look him over. But listen to me, Eleanor, your daughter needs her mother, a good sensible mother. She needs some one to go to when she's in trouble, some one to keep an eye on her a little, not too much, but just sort of a directing eye. She needs some one to help her get interested in something. Evidently her mother-in-law isn't that some one. What does she like to do? Is she musical or artistic or clever——"

"No, she isn't clever at all, and she knows it. She's

—she's rather interested in doing things in the social way. Likes to entertain—they have a big house and plenty of servants, and——"

"Good. That's something. You take her back home and see that she's the big noise in whatever your social world is. Let her give parties, but see she invites the right kind of people. Get her to have a name that she's the social dictator of her burg, and it'll give her something to do, and she'll not go far wrong because she'll want to hold her place as the big 'It.' Not a very uplifting ideal, but it works with some people. Take that girl home and keep a maternal eye on her, and give her something to do."

Eleanor sat up suddenly in her chair.

"But, Mildred," she said in a frightened voice. "I can't go home."

"Stuff and fiddlesticks! Of course you're going home!"

"How can I go home—with the divorce?"

"I don't believe in them Mexican divorces, and anyway, I've thought it all out. Didn't I hear you say that the twenty-seventh is your silver wedding anniversary? Married twenty-five years?"

"Yes," answered Eleanor.

"Well, I got a grand idea last night at the show when I saw that marriage. Today is the twentieth. Now we'll send Beth home, and I'm glad you told me about her social bug, and we'll have her give a great big welcome-home party to you, combined with the silver wedding anniversary. You blow in the day of the

event, Beth has arranged everything, and at the end of the blow-out and welcome-to-our-city hurrahs, you have your old wedding ceremony. Has the parson died or eloped with the soloist since you were married?"

"No, he still lives there."

"Good!" Mildred's eyes shone. She was in her element, staging a dramatic scene. "Well, at the end of the perfect night, you come in, in your wedding-dress—have you got it?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose it will fit?"

"Yes, I am the same now as I was then."

"Long live diet! You come in, in your wedding-dress; can have bridesmaids, flower boys and all the old fixings if Beth wants to take the trouble. It'll be a fine scene. Best show the town will see for many a moon. Give 'em something to talk about instead of slinging mud at your new face. There you'll walk down with Tom, and you'll look about as you did when you were married twenty-five years before. That is if you stop worrying and get your face back again. Then the old parson will step up and you'll go through the marriage ceremony again, just as it was done before. They'll all think it just a show, but it'll be real, and you'll be married to Tom again, and even if that Mexico divorce isn't good, it'll make things more settled in your own mind, and you won't feel that you are living with Tom unlawfully or illegally, whatever it is. Tom'll just think he's married twice to the same woman—or he won't think much one way

or the other; he'll be so tickled to see you and you'll look so much like the girl he married twenty-five years ago, that you're liable to be a widow on the spot. He'll die of pride."

Eleanor leaned towards Mildred eagerly.

"Do you suppose it can be done?"

"Sure, it can be done. What's to hinder?"

"I don't know. Do you suppose any one would ever find it out?"

"How'd they find it out? Certainly not. Hardly any of the company knew your name; no one knows where Mexico is, let alone what goes on there; and, take it from me, Rafaelo won't talk. He's going to forget you—has done it already and got another baby."

Eleanor rose, a different woman than when she entered. Hope again had come to her. Perhaps after all the wreck she had made of her life, she could be rescued. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed, her beautiful face dimpled with smiles.

"There you are," Mildred said, standing off and looking at her with an appraising eye. "There you are. Give your face a chance to beam and you are some eyeful. Why, you'll make that old home town sit up with a jerk, and Beth'll throw this party, and not leave any one out. Don't give any one a chance to register a grouch—and you'll step in and own the place in a month."

Eleanor started to leave the room. Mildred started for the telephone.

"What was that hotel where this Fred is registered? I'm going to get him over for lunch and give him the once over. He'll have had time by then to put some ice on his head and take some bromo seltzer. I want to sell him and Beth the idea of this party, and I want to sell it big. It must be no piker of a party."

Eleanor laughed. "Don't worry about Fred. Spending money is his middle name. That's been his trouble, he has had too much money to spend."

Beth was very repentant when she awoke, and a little ashamed. Eleanor did not speak of the fact that she had been drinking, and finally Beth became more at her ease, thinking perhaps her mother had not noticed it. When Fred came in for lunch, they were at first a little distant, evidently remembering the quarrel of the night before, but they could not be stiff long before Mildred's easy-going hospitality. Finally they were all laughing and had a jolly lunch.

After the coffee, Mildred said to Eleanor:

"Now, Eleanor, I want you to beat it. I want to talk to Fred and Beth, and I can do a better job without you. Beat it," and she pushed Eleanor towards the door.

Then she sat down, took a cigarette, gave one to Beth and Fred and told them of her plan for the welcome-home party that Beth was to give her mother. And the grande finale, the marriage ceremony. Mildred was a good salesman, and before she was halfway through they were most enthusiastic and one added a detail and another, both interested, eager, sit-

ting forward on their chairs, offering suggestions, making plans—until Mildred had no doubt that her scheme would succeed.

Finally she said: "Now you children go home, get things started. And don't forget anybody, and make them so delighted with the party that they'll forget everything but that her family are delighted to see her home. Then they won't gossip; they can't kick if you don't. Good-by. Stop in the bedroom and kiss fond Mother, and hustle to the station."

When they left, Eleanor came into the room, a very happy, radiant Eleanor.

"Say, ain't I the little fixer? Gee—I wish I was going with you, but I can't. I begin to work next week," said Mildred.

"What do you think of Fred?" asked Eleanor.

"Oh, he's all right. Youth will be youth; some young men chase temptations and too much booze and bathing beauties as naturally as a fox terrier a rat. They don't really want any of the three, neither does the terrier want the rat—but he likes the excitement. Likes to think he's a big sport. But Papa should cut down the income. He's had too much money. All three of those diversions require money. But he'll settle down and go to work one of these days and surprise you all. He'll end up by wheeling the twins in the baby-carriage."

Eleanor left the night before the twenty-seventh in order to arrive on that eventful day. When she was ready to go, Mildred took her in her arms and kissed

her affectionately. "I do like you, though you are an awful dumbell. But you've had your lesson. Now go home and forget it all. Eat some real food, and think of me once in a while when you put your teeth into a fat juicy piece of pie; and forget your face and forget yourself. That's where happiness comes, just in forgetting yourself. You got a lot to keep you busy in the right way. There's Peg and the baby, and Beth and her career as a great social light, and you might put Fred into politics. He seems to be a good mixer. Then there's Tom," and Mildred's voice became softer. "Just be nice to Tom, Eleanor. When he seems stupid and dull, and wants to put his feet in the family slippers and read the *Saturday Evening Post,* or even play casino—just remember——"

Eleanor put her hand on Mildred's mouth. There were tears in her eyes and her voice trembled as she said:

"Don't, Mildred. You don't need to say anything more. I will always remember—and—and—— Oh, Tom, dear Tom—I—I——"

Mildred laughingly pushed her from the room. There were tears in her eyes also.

CHAPTER XXII

MILDRED sat back in her chair and unfolded the paper that had been sent her by Eleanor. She read it for a few minutes, then said:

"Listen to this, Jack. They certainly did it up brown. Listen," and she read: "'Welcome Home for Mrs. Wakefield.' That's the head-lines. Here's it: 'Last night Mrs. Fred Paige gave a welcome-home party for her mother, who has returned from a visit to relatives on the Coast. The beautiful Paige home was decorated with a mass of flowers sent from Chicago. The orchestra, led by Frank Wheaten, also came from that city. All society was gathered to welcome this charming matron, who is one of the leaders in our smart set, and the originator of the Country Club. The end of the party was a surprise to the guests. It seems that Mrs. Wakefield timed her arrival on the twenty-fifth anniversary of her marriage.

"'At eleven o'clock the big library doors were thrown open and the room was decorated to make it appear a chapel. Against the background of flowers that formed the altar was Rev. William Blackburn in his vestments with an open Prayer Book in his hand. The tones of the big organ were heard playing a wedding-march, and two little flower girls entered, strewing rose-petals. Then followed six bridesmaids. These

bridesmaids and the ushers were the sons and daughters of the bridesmaids who had attended Mrs. Wakefield at her wedding, and the flower girls were the children of her former flower girls. Their costumes were the exact replicas of the costumes worn by their mothers twenty-five years ago. Then came the sensation. Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield entered, Mrs. Wakefield in her original wedding-dress and veil. Every one gave a gasp, as Mrs. Wakefield seemed to have turned back the clock. She was the same young girl who had gone to the altar twenty-five years ago. There were many murmurs from old friends who had attended her wedding. It seemed impossible to realize that this was Eleanor Wakefield, their friend of twenty-five years, instead of Eleanor Taylor, the young girl they had seen standing before the altar a quarter of a century before.

" 'The marriage ceremony was solemnly performed' (listen to that, Jack, *solemnly* performed) 'by the Rev. Blackburn, who had united them in marriage twenty-five years ago.

" 'After the wedding ceremony the guests gathered around the bride and groom and gave them hearty congratulations. It was an unique and picturesque ending to a very happy evening.

" 'Mrs. Paige is giving a series of entertainments for her mother.' Now what'd I tell you? Won't that put a kibosh on all gossip? She's taken my advice about daughter—'going to give a series of entertainments'—'ashes in the mouth'—but it'll keep her busy.

Well, Eleanor is married good and fast and solid again. Anyway, whether it is legal or not, she'll feel right about it, and I do hope she has learned a lesson. I have, I'll mind my own business hereafter. Well—let's go to bed and call it the end of a perfect day."

CHAPTER XXIII

About two weeks after Eleanor's arrival home, she and Tom were sitting in the library. Tom was reading the evening paper and Eleanor was embroidering a jacket for Jim, Jr. Tom turned over the paper and said:

"Say, Eleanor, do you want to go the movies? I see Rafaelo Cortez is on, in his new piece."

Eleanor was silent for just a moment; then she laughed a little happy laugh.

"No—I don't care to go out. Let's play casino, Tom. I'll get the cards."

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